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MOUNT SINAI PETRA, & THE DESERT.

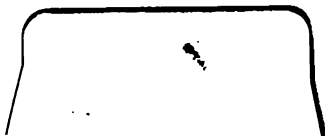


CONVENT OF ST. CATHERINE.

DESIGNED BY J. H. STODOLSKY



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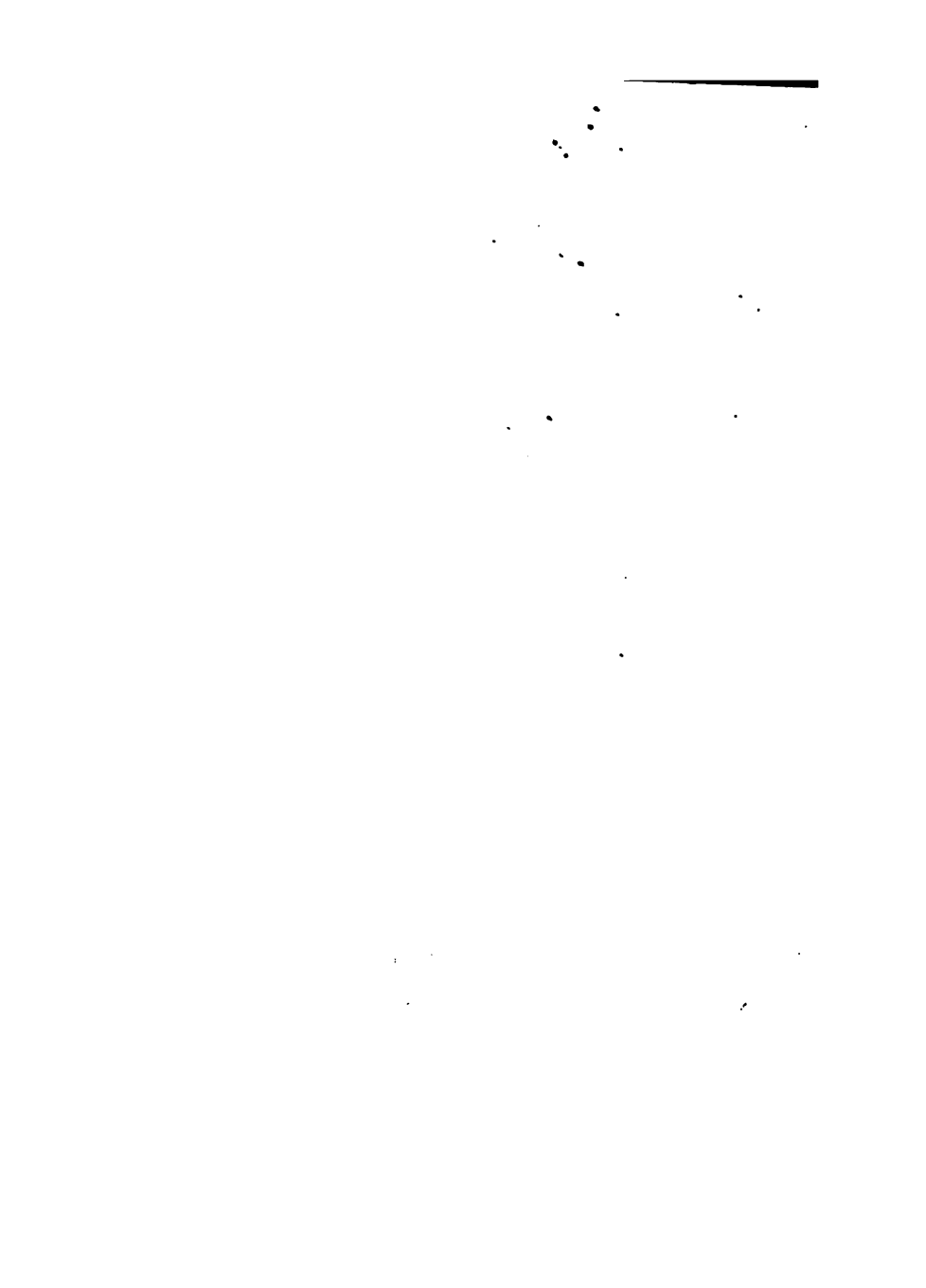






MOUNT SINAI,
PETRA, AND THE DESERT.

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MOUNT SINAI.

MOUNT SINAI,
PETRA, AND THE DESERT,

Described and Illustrated.

BY THE
AUTHOR OF "THE CATACOMBS OF ROME," ETC.

WITH TWENTY-THREE ILLUSTRATIONS.



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MOUNT SINAI.



CHAPTER I.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SINAITIC PENINSULA.



GLANCE at the map will show the reader, as intervening like a wedge between the continents of Asia and Africa,—between the continent which was the first to receive the seeds of civilization, and the continent which has been the last to acknowledge its influence,—a triangle of desert and mountain, known for the greater part of its area as the Desert of Arabia Petræa, towards its southern termination as the Peninsula of Sinai. Carl Ritter has described it as the “connecting link” between the two great continents,* but, to judge from its physical geography, we would rather say that it was intended to separate, to dissociate them. Its eastern boundary is formed by the Gulf of Akabah and the mountain-range of Esh

* Carl Ritter, “Comparative Geography of Palestine,” i. 1.

Sherah; neither of which, in the old times, can have been easily traversed. On the west it is bounded by the Gulf of Suez, and a long tract of salt marshes. And between these difficult boundaries spread, in the north, a wide, wild, sandy waste; and, in the south, a mass of rugged peaks intersected by dangerous defiles, which seem to have been created for the purpose of prohibiting the intrusion of man. "It is impossible," says a recent traveller,* "to convey any idea of the feeling of utter weariness that grows upon the solitary wanderer, as day by day he penetrates further into the heart of this great and terrible wilderness, as ravine succeeds to ravine, each more forsaken and desolate than the last, with its bed of sand or gravel, overhung with mountains, which, in their convulsed forms, their bold and awful abruptness, their arid colouring of brown, black, white, red, and yellow, glaring eternally under the same fiery sun, seem like a portion of some early world untenanted by man, some blasted planet visible in the wildness of our dreams, where human foot has never trodden, and human life has neither object nor subsistence. The mechanical and silent footfall of the camel, pacing noiselessly from morn to night among the voiceless crags, lulls us, in the absence of all external signs of life, into a state of reverie, sometimes humorous, sometimes sad, which is not without its charms; Laborde says that he was unwillingly aroused from its fascinations. The mind falls back

* Bartlett, "Forty Days in the Desert," 50.



THE DESERT FROM AYUN MUSA.

upon itself, and delights to recall the events, in all their vividness, of that early period when the Israelitish host threaded these weary defiles—to represent to itself every incident of their toilsome march, and the feeling of horror and amazement that must have daunted their spirits, as they felt themselves transported from verdant Egypt into the heart of a solitude, of which we may indeed say—

‘So lonely ’tis, that God himself
Scarce seemeth there to be.’

Or, it may be, glancing to its own recollections, the memory awakens, in preternatural vividness, or painful intensity, passages of old joys and sorrows, which have long slept amidst the din and movement of an active life, which is here cut off; burdens again the soul with the presence

‘Of that weight which it would cast
Aside for ever;’

or binds it, during these solitary hours, as upon a wheel of fire, to the torture of those uneasy thoughts, which, like evil spirits, delight to visit us in solitude.”

Yet such is the enterprise, and such the resolution of man, that from a very early period he has forced a passage through the mountain defile, and trodden out a route across the sandy plain; and both in the desert and among the mountains events have taken place, of the profoundest interest in themselves, and of the most momentous consequence to the future of mankind. Shut up, as Ritter says, between the sea

and the wilderness, the Peninsula of Sinai especially has been the scene of incidents of the most remarkable character, receiving from them, so to speak, a sanctity or consecration which has made it the sacred vestibule of the history of our Christian faith.

The earliest accounts of the Greeks and Romans regarding the Sinaitic region do not date further back than the epoch of Alexander the Great. It is not too much to say, indeed, that the entire Arabian Peninsula was discovered by him. He commissioned one of his officers, Hiero of Sicily, to sail in a thirty-oared vessel from the mouth of the Euphrates, round the southern point of Arabia, to the head of the Gulf of Suez. But Hiero found the enterprise beyond his means. At all events, he returned to Alexander with the information, which he doubtlessly believed to be correct, that the Arabian Peninsula was equal in magnitude to that of Hindostan.

One of the earliest tasks undertaken by the learned and accomplished monarchs of the Ptolemean dynasty of Egypt was, to ascertain the character of the Indian Ocean, with the view of opening up commercial communications between Sabæa and India. The result of their well-designed efforts was, indirectly, to add to the then existing state of knowledge regarding the shores of the Sinaitic Peninsula.

In those early days of navigation, very exaggerated ideas of the perils of the Red Sea prevailed; and mariners, fearing to launch out into the deep, crept cautiously along the coast, where, however, they

exposed themselves to dangers far more real. The masters of the whole Sinai district, both interior and littoral, were the Nabathæans, a bold and powerful commercial people, who rivalled the Egyptians in their trade with India, and fitted out pirate-ships to cruise in the Red Sea. Despite of their intercourse with the great nations of antiquity, with Egypt, and Babylon, and Arabia, and Phœnicia, their mode of government was either so complex or so little understood, that from none of the earlier writers can we gain any very clear idea of the state of the country while it was under their rule. The first writer who speaks of the splendours of Petra, the Nabathæan capital, is Strabo; and it is Strabo who tells us that the Nabathæans, while enjoying the most entire concord among themselves, were resolute in their resistance to, and profound in their hatred of, all foreign powers: so that when Augustus offered them the Roman alliance, they did not hesitate to reject it.

From Diodorus Siculus we learn that two expeditions were despatched by Antigonus, the successor of Alexander, to conquer Petra and its territory.

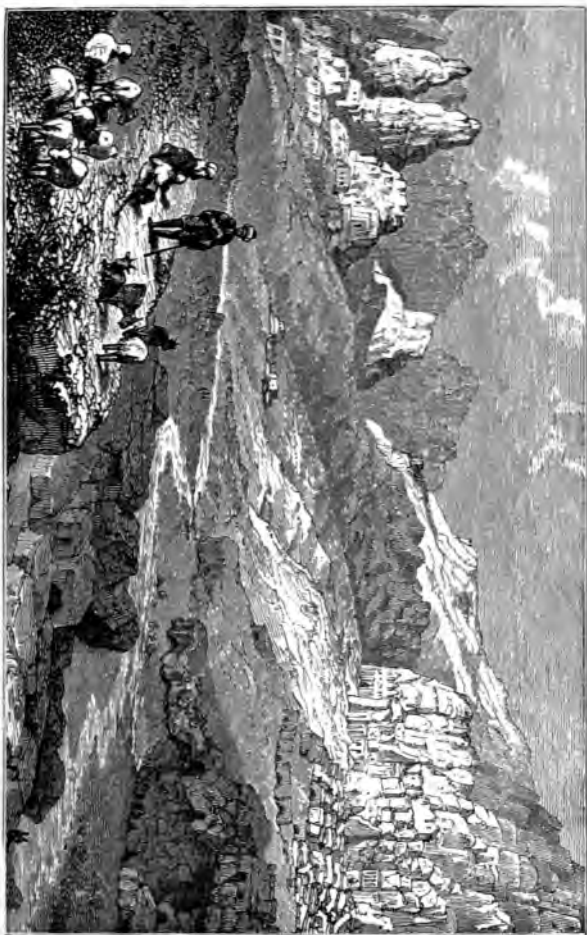
The first was placed under the command of Athenæus (about 310 B.C.), and arrived before Petra when most of its inhabitants were absent, and engaged in celebrating a religious festival. The Greek general immediately resolved on storming the city; and carrying it by assault, he slew its defenders, and loaded his army with plunder. But on his return he was overtaken by the Nabathæans, who, surprising him

at night, fully avenged the massacre of their fellow-citizens.

The sketch, says Ritter,* which Diodorus gives of Petra and its inhabitants differs but little from that which would be given now, except in so far as relates to its antiquities. To designate the people he even uses the word *Arab*, making no distinction between Arabs, Idumæans, and Nabathæans. Their country, he says, is destitute of rivers, brooks, and springs. It is the law of their land neither to sow grain, plant fruit trees, nor drink wine; which exactly resembles the statute prevalent among the children of Jonadab, son of Rechab (Jer. xxxv. 6-10), who claim to be connected with the descendants of Hammath, or Hemath, the Midianite. The inhabitants of Petra and its neighbourhood are not allowed to erect permanent houses, lest they should excite the cupidity of foreign nations, and invite the tyranny of the foreigner. Some of them are engaged in breeding camels; others, sheep; others carry on a considerable traffic in myrrh, frankincense, and spices from Arabia Felix. Above all things, "Freedom is their liking;" and if they are attacked by a superior force, they take to flight rather than surrender themselves prisoners. As the country, however, is comparatively waterless, they are not liable to frequent invasion.

The second expedition against the Nabathæans, under Demetrius, was more successful than the first. He surrounded Petra, and made formidable prepara-

* Ritter, "Comparative Geography of Palestine," 20.



PETRA.

tions for its siege. The inhabitants, at first, maintained a gallant resistance; but finding themselves overmatched, they sent a message to the Syrian general, saying that they would consent to pay a large sum of money if he would withdraw his forces without a battle, or that they would defend themselves until every man perished. Demetrius accepted the money.

Efforts were made by Pompey, Julius Cæsar, and Augustus, to bring Arabia Petræa within the iron circle of the Roman Empire; but this object was not effected until the reign of Trajan, whose prefect, Cornelius Palma, captured Petra (105 A.D.). But the dynasty of the Nabathæan kings had already terminated.

Strabo, who wrote in the reign of the Emperor Augustus, has recorded some particulars regarding Petra, for which he was indebted to his friend, the philosopher Athenodorus, who had visited the place. He says that it lay in a level region, but was itself surrounded by rocks, which on the outer side were steep and inaccessible, but within were hollowed out for houses, and supplied with gardens and an abundance of springs. The district in the neighbourhood, particularly on the side towards Sabæa, was an arid desert.

Pliny also alludes to Petra; yet while giving an accurate picture of its condition, he makes serious mistakes regarding its distance from prominent points. He says: "In the midst of the country of the Na-

bathæans lies the city of Petra, within a vale, which we can traverse in three-quarters of an hour. It is surrounded on all sides by inaccessible mountains, and a brook flows through its midst."

Petra was not the only city in the peninsula. In an ancient record, belonging to the third century, and known as the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, we find two main roads indicated as running one in an eastern, the other in a western direction to Jerusalem; with three minor roads; and on these roads lay several places of more or less importance.

On the eastern route we read of Haila or Aela; Haurana; Zadogatta; [Petris or Petra]; Negla or Hegla; Thomia or Thoana; and Rabbath Moab or Rababatora.

On the western route lay Haila or Aela; Diana; Rasa or Gerasa; Cypsoria or Gypsoria; Lysa; and Obodo (Ebuda).

Ptolemy, however, at an earlier date, speaks of four cities which are omitted from the *Tabula Peutingeriana*—namely, Characmobra, Sebunta, Bostra, and Zoara.

Characmobra is identified by Ritter with *Kerak*, the capital of Moab, now known as Kerek, and still a place of some prosperity. It lies half a day's journey south of the ruins of Rabbath Moab, on the south-east margin of the Dead Sea. It was visited by Seetzen in 1806, and by Burckhardt in 1812.

Sebunta, or *Esbunta*, is the Heshbon of the Bible,

described in the Book of Joshua as the head city of the king of the Amorites.

Bostra, *Bozra*, or *Bosra*, is the Bozrah of the Bible,—the capital of Edom.

Zoar does not belong to Arabia Petræa. It is the ancient name of one of the five Cities of the Plain, which stood on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, and escaped the destruction in which Sodom and Gomorrah were involved. It is mentioned in the Bible under the additional name of Bela, or “Destruction;” but its name *Zoar* is translated in the Hebrew, “Little-ness.” In the Greek it is written Segor (Σηγώρ).

In the fifth century it was the seat of a bishopric.

A tradition of the name *Segor* (or *Zoghar*), and of the place, probably reached the ears of the Crusaders; for Fulcher Carnotensis, in the year 1100, pushed forward to the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, and discovered a place called Segor, inhabited by agricultural Arabs, who mostly fled at his approach. According to his description, it was situated in the midst of very beautiful scenery, richly studded with palm trees; hence the Crusaders designated it *Villa Palmarum*. But the new name did not take root, and has passed away with the palm-trees.

There were several bishoprics in Arabia Petræa besides that of Segor; namely, Arindela, Aela, Mensida, Areopolis, Elusa, Augustopolis, Arad, Thamara, Aroer, Moladah, Phoenus, Thana, Thewan, and Eboda.

Areopolis, or *Rabbath Moab*, is the Ar of the Bible.

See Deuteronomy ii. 9, 18, 29; and Numbers xxi. 15. Its site is still called *Rabba*.

We read of *Arad* in Judges i. 16: "And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm-trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad." And again, in Numbers xxi. 1: "And when [the] king [of] Arad, the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners." Robinson identifies it with a hill, *Tell 'Arad*, situated an hour and a half south-east by east from *Milh*, the ancient *Moladah*.

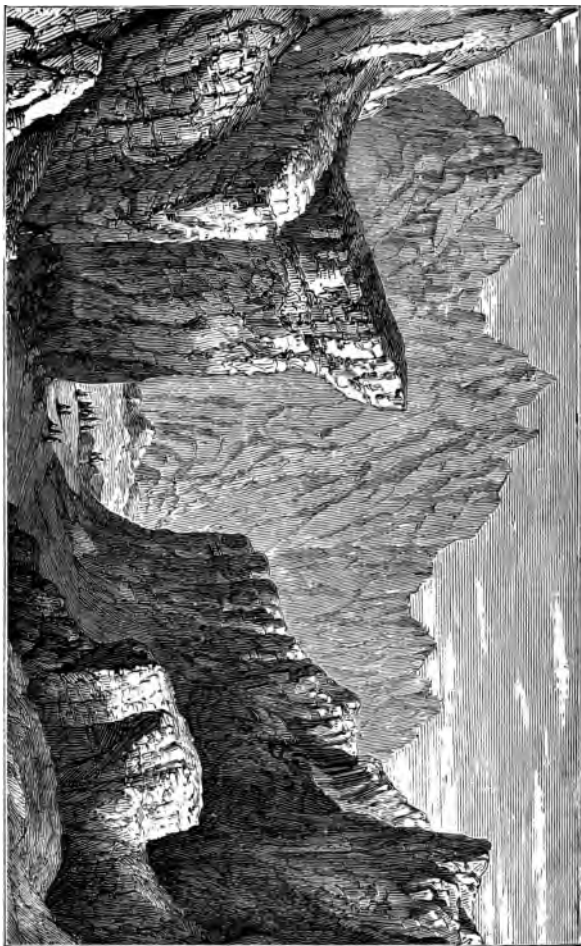
Thamara is probably the Tamar of Ezekiel (xlvii. 19, and xlviii. 28).

Of *Aroer* mention is made but once in the Old Testament; namely, in 1 Samuel xxx. 28, in which we read of David's gifts to his allies after his defeat of the Amalekites. It appears to have been one of the allies. Robinson* identifies its site with *Wády 'Ar'árah*, on the road from Petra to Gaza, where his attention was attracted by a pile of ruins. He tells us that from a hill to the south of these he could sweep with his gaze the wide and beautiful plain of Beersheba, towards *Moladah* and *Arad*; and that, beyond these, the horizon was bounded by the lofty hills of Judah.

The references to *Moladah* in Holy Writ are several.

* Dr. Robinson, "Biblical Researches," ii. 109.

WILDERNESS OF EDOM.



Robinson identifies it with the modern El-Milh, but we know of no fact of interest respecting it.

At *Punon* the Israelites rested on their long journey to the land of the Canaanites. Eusebius and Jerome suppose it to be the same as the Phaeno of their own time, which was remarkable for some valuable mines of copper; but all traces of it have been lost.

Teman, it is said, was named after Teman, a descendant of Esau.* In Holy Writ it seems to be used to indicate the south country, or the land of Edom. As, for instance, in the well-known passage, Amos i. 12: "But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah." So in Habakkuk's lofty prayer: "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran" (Hab. iii. 3). We are told that the descendants of Esau, and especially the inhabitants of Teman, were celebrated for their sagacity (Jer. xlix. 7). All trace of the name, however, has been lost. As Mr. Poole observes, the occupation of the country by the Nabathæans seems to have swept away nearly all the memorials (never very distinct) of the migratory tribes of the desert.

Eliphaz the Temanite, a friend of the patriarch Job, was one of the wise men of Edom. It will be observed that he is represented as speaking with more calmness and authority than either Bildad or Zophar, and that he dwells with much beauty and force of language on the surpassing majesty and ineffable purity of God (Job iv. 12-21; xv. 12-16).

* See Gen. xxxvi. 11; and 1 Chron. i. 35, 36, 43-54

Ebuda may, perhaps, be the Oboth of the Bible. Allusion to it occurs in Num. xxi. 10, 11, and xxxiii. 43, 44, where it is spoken of as one of the encampments of the Israelites, after the death of Aaron. Its exact site is wholly unknown.

Kadesh-Barnea is more interesting to the Biblical student than any of the obscure localities we have been endeavouring to identify. In the early annals of the wanderings of the Israelites it plays an important part. It was the scene of the death of the prophetess Miriam; the extreme point which the Israelites reached in their direct march to Canaan; from thence the spies were despatched to explore the land of the enemy; and it was here that they vented their reproaches against Moses and Aaron: "Why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die?" (Num. xx. 4.) It was here, too, that Moses performed the miracle of the Smitten Rock; and the water came out abundantly, and the "congregation drank, and their beasts also."

The site of Kadesh, however, remains uncertain. The balance of evidence, as far as we can judge, fixes it in the wilderness of Paran, or *Et-Tih*, at the Ain-el-Weibeh.* Dean Stanley offers as an objection to this conclusion that the locality in question does not afford among its stony shelves of three or four feet high, any proper cliff or rock from which, at Moses' command, the water could have flowed. On the other

* Dr. Robinson, "Biblical Researches," ii. 175.

hand, it lies almost immediately opposite the *Wâdy** *Ghuweir*, the great gap, or gate, in the precipitous eastern mountain-wall of the Arabah, and, consequently, the most probable route by which the Israelite army could march through the border of Edom.†

On the two minor routes to which reference has been made in a preceding page we meet with no cities of special importance. *Raphia*, the first station southward, is the modern Rafa; the modern *Kateih* is the ancient Casium.

The cross routes which traverse the centre of the peninsula necessarily open up the principal features of the country. The Haj or Pilgrim Route—that is, the route taken by the Mohammedan pilgrims to Mecca—struck across the desert from Ajerud to Akaba Ailu. It was described by Thevenot in 1658, and does not seem to have differed greatly from the track followed by Shaw in 1721; by Pococke, in 1738; by Rûppell, in 1822; and Burckhardt, in 1812. The journey of the last-named we shall very briefly sketch.

After following up the route taken by preceding travellers to Wâdy Nakht, Burckhardt discovered the great and interesting valley of the Wâdy Arabah, or the Lower Ghor, which stretches from the Dead Sea

* A valley, or water-course.

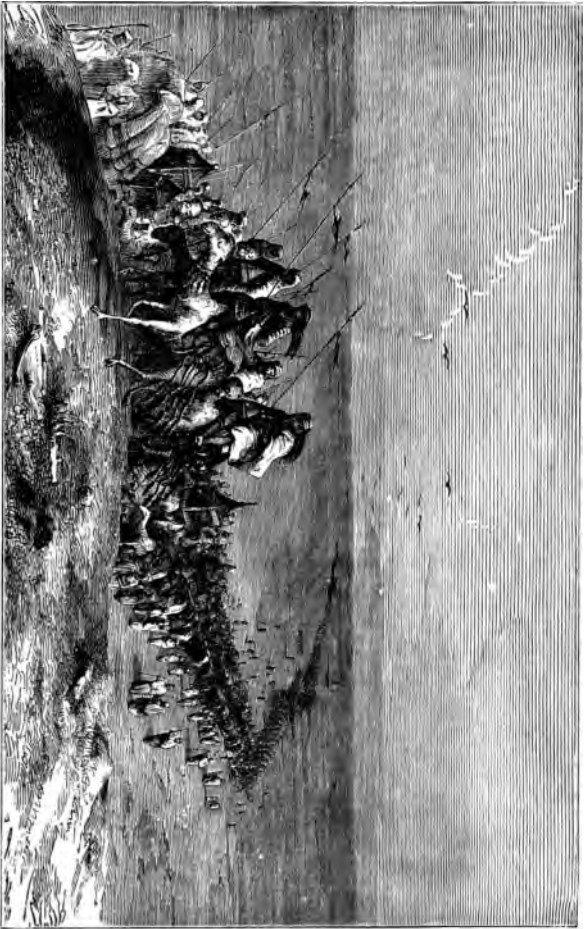
† See an exhaustive article in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible" (vol. II.), by the Rev. H. Hayman, B. D.

to the Gulf of Akabah. He also ascended the bold mountain-range which encloses it on the west, and crossed the northern part of the desert of Et-Tih; thus laying down a new line of travel, which, since his time, has been explored by Collier and Robinson with the most satisfactory results.

His journey occupied eight days, and was made in the hottest season of the year; namely, between the 25th of August and the 6th of September. His companions were Arabs, whose daily fare was a pound and a half of black bread each. He himself had a somewhat more generous diet of meal, and bread, and butter, with a preparation of sour milk, dried, which, mixed with water, afforded a refreshing beverage.

The greater part of the first day was spent in ascending Jebel Kula, the loftiest peak of the Shera range. It took eight hours to climb to its summit, where he pitched his camp for the night.

On the following day, the caravan toiled for an hour along the stony ridge of the mountain, before reaching a point where the descent could be begun. This descent proved both difficult and dangerous. The whole western slope, which was composed of sandstone and limestone, proved to be entirely destitute of vegetation,—not a tree, not a shrub, not even a bush. They passed a place where the Arabs of several tribes were said to bury their dead. Then they continued their course through a sterile country, a mere gap or passage channelled by Nature in a mass



GARAVAN ON THE ROAD TO MECCA.

of rock, and frequently not above thirty feet wide, until they reached the Wâdy Arabah. They came occasionally to a wayside spring, but the water was always of indifferent quality.

The great Arabah valley is, however, entirely destitute of water; all the winter torrents descending towards it from the Jebel Shera being absorbed before they reach the level, and no springs existing in the valley itself.

Burckhardt found that the wâdy, at the point where he crossed it, ran from north-north-east to south-south-west. He describes it as resembling a sea of sand, broken up by numerous congealed billows. The sand, he thought, had been driven northward from the shore of the Dead Sea. The Arabs informed him that the same monotonous appearance was continued for mile upon mile, even beyond Wâdy Mûsa. The only relief to the dreary character of the scene was afforded by occasional groups of green acacia, tamarisk, adha, and rethem trees; but grass was altogether wanting, and no shrubs were to be found. The rainy season, it is true, temporarily fertilizes the waste into a good pasturage, and many tribes of Arabs then encamp there; but it seems that the camels prefer to browse upon the succulent leaves of the trees, rather than to nibble at the new and rank produce of the season.

Turning off at the mouth of the Wâdy Gharundel, our adventurous traveller struck across the deep sands of the Lower Ghor, and then commenced the long

ascent of the western range of mountains. Their soil is entirely silicious; and in one place Burckhardt discovered an oval piece of flint, between three and four feet in length, and one and a half in breadth.

Crossing the range, which is named Jebel Beyane, he descended into the western plain, which, although at a somewhat higher level than the Wâdy Arabah, is a thousand feet lower than the great eastern desert. It is not less dreary and desolate, however; it forms a vast, unbroken solitude, whose uniformity is only occasionally relieved by hillocks of sand.

On the following day, Burckhardt arrived at the Wâdy Labyane, where he met with traces of an old road which once ran from Akabah to Gaza and Jerusalem. The soil of the wâdy was gravelly, and the place had been selected by a few Heywat Arabs on account of the partiality of the camels to the tender branches of the acacia-trees which it produces. These poor fellows had no tents; and their only protection against the sun by day and the dew at night was that which the thin acacia branches afforded.


The next day's march brought him to a range of low mountains separating the plain he had already traversed from the central desert known as *Et-Tih* proper; the scene, according to both the Jewish and Mohammedan traditions, of the wanderings of the Israelites. The range is known as Jebel Rakab. It was crossed in four hours, and the caravan then

reached the important spring of El-Themmed, whose waters are slightly sulphurous.

The next stage brought him to the pleasant oasis of Nakht, a green spot in the barren wilderness. Thence he proceeded to the castle of Nakht, which contains a small garrison. The remainder of the route presents no objects of interest.

CHAPTER II.

THE WESTERN COAST OF THE PENINSULA.

HE peninsula of Arabia Petræa is bounded on the east by the Gulf of Suez. Its survey naturally begins at the southernmost point, the Ras (or Cape) Mohammed. From this point northward there is nothing to relieve the monotony of the coast until we arrive at Tûr.

The wedge of land situated between the Gulf of Suez and Akabah is the Egyptian *Sicka el Hejas*, or "Way to Heja." It has been described as a right-angled triangle, whose apex lies at Akabah, while the base is represented by an imaginary line running from Suez to Ras Mohammed. This line extends from lat. $27^{\circ} 30'$ to 30° N., or two and a half degrees, while that which stretches from Akabah to the same cape extends lat. $27^{\circ} 30'$ to 29° , or less than two degrees. The third side of the triangle, from Akabah to Suez, is somewhat longer.

The Ras itself is a small level headland of limestone, which, at its southern extremity, confronts the sea with low precipitous cliffs, not exceeding a hun-

dred feet in height: it is connected with the mainland by a narrow sandy isthmus.

Túr, or Et-Tor, is an important harbour, surveyed as early as 1541. From a very distant date it was the landing-place of pilgrims bound on a journey to the consecrated localities of the Sinaitic peninsula; and it has always been the most convenient starting-point for travellers who prefer a sea route to a land one. The town is occupied by a small but permanent population, and well supplied with most of the conveniences and comforts to which Europeans are so partial.

Of its early history we possess little information; but we may presume that it was a place where tribute was received from pilgrims, and that as such it gradually supplanted Koshem, at the head of the gulf. Seated in the neighbourhood of the ancient Phœnicon, it was frequented as a harbour, and as the seat of a small pearl-fishery, from a remote antiquity. The springs in the vicinity are numerous and good; and this circumstance probably led to the foundation of the monastery, and the *hospitium* for pilgrims, whose ruins may still be traced among the groves of palm. The inland views are very fine, and above terrace after terrace of limestone hills rises conspicuous the sacred summit of Mount St. Catharine.

Some dangerous coral reefs lie off this part of the shore. They are remarkable as the scene of the scientific labours of Ehrenberg, to whom we are in-

debted for so much valuable knowledge of the characteristics of the *infusoria*.

According to Rüppell, the climate of the western littoral of the peninsula is generally healthful, and febrile influences are non-existent. That scourge of the East, dysentery, seldom makes its appearance, notwithstanding the sudden changes of temperature to which the country is exposed. In the mountainous districts the nights are almost always cold,—in February, water not unfrequently freezes in the convent garden at Sinai; but, on the other hand, the sandy valleys, near Tor, are intensely hot in summer, partly on account of the cloudless sky, partly from the glare of the rocks, and partly owing to the radiation of the sand.

Inland, at a distance which varies considerably, rise the mountains of the Tûr, which form, strictly speaking, the mountain-land of the peninsula. Their greatest elevation exceeds 9000 feet, and their mighty mass, as Dean Stanley says,* constitutes the southern tower of that long belt or chain of hills, whose northern bulwark is the double range of Lebanon. It is the "southern limit of the history of the Israelites," whose boundaries, in the narrower sense, were Dan and Beersheba; in the wider sense, Lebanon and Sinai.

Between this mountain-range and the coast we are describing extends the plain of El-Kâ'a, generally reaching the blue waters of the gulf, but occasionally

* Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," p. 9.

interrupted by a lower range of hills, the spurs or buttresses of the Sinaitic range, which contain the two remarkable summits of Nákús, or the "Bell," and Mukatteb, or the "Written." On their north-western, and on their eastern sides, these mountains of the Tûr descend so abruptly to the shores of the respective gulfs or arms of the Red Sea, that little more than the beach is left between the steep rocky ramparts and the incoming tides.

The coast-line of the gulf, for almost its whole extent, is broken up by the mouths of the numerous *wadys*, or water-courses, descending from the mountains. Many of these form harbours of more or less importance; some are available for ships of considerable burden. Six are indicated on Moresby's chart; twenty-eight is the number given by Ritter, who follows Ehrenberg's MS. journal.

These are—Tor,* or Tûr; Abu Suared; El-Ghub; El-Quas; El-Bitan, where whales have been seen; Guter el Gazu; Abu-darbe; Djebur; Shaeb el Guza,* whose entrance is protected by a coral reef; Shera-tibh; Negasaht; Abu-rasifa; Bir-tehi; Betran; Abu Selime;* Halak el Guareb; El-Benkie; Grundela; Faroun, or Pharaoh's Baths, where at high tide the depth of water is 40 to 45 fathoms; and El-Hammam,* so called from the warm springs in the neighbourhood; Seffaje; Lagai; El-Haraba; Chor Debba;* Matamar; Sadder; Mesalbäht; Ajun; and Suez.*

* These are the harbours capable of affording accommodation to large vessels.

The depth of the sea along the coast averages from 15 to 30 fathoms.

The warm springs of *El-Hammam* mark, according to Arab tradition, the spot where Moses resided for many years. Their medicinal properties are described as valuable. Their temperature is about 28° Réaumur.*

DIGRESSION:—JEBEL NAKUS AND JEBEL MUKATTEB.

The mountain of *Nākūs*,† or the “Bell,” derives its name from the old legend‡ that certain mysterious sounds occasionally heard in, as was supposed, its interior were the matin and vesper chime of the bells of a convent which, by some convulsion of nature, had been engulfed within its bosom. It was discovered, however, by Wellsted that the bell-like sound really arises from the lapse of sandy particles down the mountain-sides. This he proved by running down the mountain-slope at a rapid pace: the sound was then so loud that it would have almost terrified him had he not known its cause.

The mountain of *Mukatteb*, or “Inscriptions,” is also known as *Jebel Hiram*, or the “Mount of Death.” The Arabs report that it is haunted by evil spirits; a fancy evidently suggested by its weird and desolate

* See Stanley, “Sinai and Palestine,” pp. 8-10; Laborde, “Voyage,” p. 66; Wellsted, “Travels,” p. 50; Ritter, “Comparative Geography,” pp. 152-160.

† The *nākūs* is not, strictly speaking, a bell, but a rude cymbal or sounding-board, used in Greek churches.

‡ Related by Bernard von Breydenbach, Dean of Mainz, in 1483.

appearance. Its chief interest is due to the numerous inscriptions traced on its soft sandstone cliffs. These consist of written characters and the outlines of letters,—some Greek, some Hebrew, some Arabic; their meaning is uncertain, but they do not appear to belong to any very remote antiquity, and were probably engraved at different dates by passing travellers or Christian pilgrims. The cross is often found among them; and not only the cross, but the alpha and omega. A few, it may be admitted, date from an earlier epoch, such as that of the Roman dominion in Arabia; but there is no ground whatever for the fanciful supposition that they were wrought by the Israelites on their passage through the wilderness. Similar inscriptions occur in various parts of the peninsula, in the Wâdy Sigri, the Wâdy Mûghareh, the Wâdy Feirân, the Wâdy Aleyat, the Abû-Hamad, and on the summit of Mount Serbal. But among these are some of Egyptian origin,—the cartouches of Egyptian kings; and, necessarily, they belong to a period two or three thousand years prior to the Christian era.*

The following description of the writings in the Wâdy Mukatteb we borrow from Mr. Stewart:†—

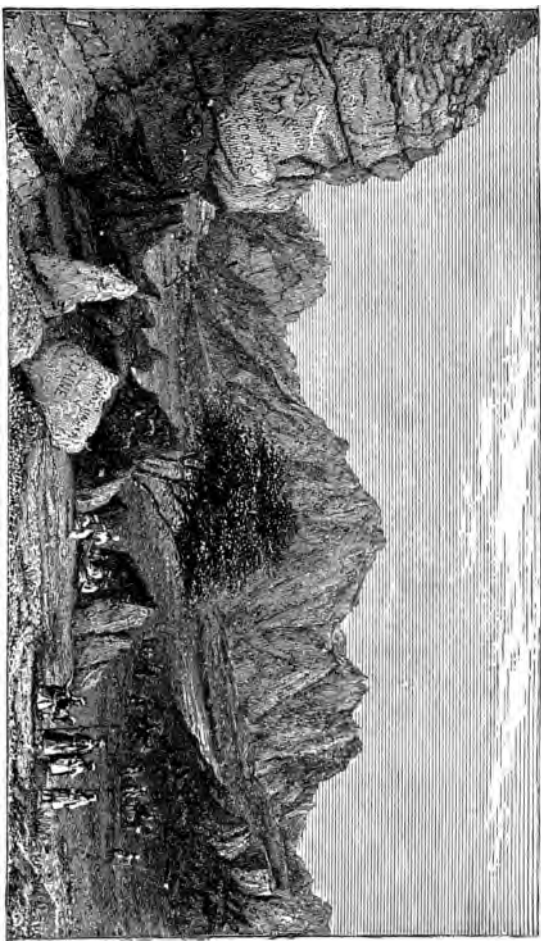
“On entering the lower part of the wâdy,” he says, “we came abreast of a ridge of red sandstone rock, jutting out like a promontory into the plain called Hagar el Nameen, completely covered with

* Robinson, “Biblical Researches,” i. 118.

† Stewart, “The Tent and the Khan,” pp. 90, 91.

inscriptions in the Sinaitic character, some of which are in excellent preservation, though the greater number are much defaced by the lapse of time, the action of the elements, and the soft nature of the stone. I counted thirteen lines, but of these two are now so obliterated that it would be impossible to copy them exactly; and, with the exception of the figure of an ass, cut out at the bottom of one of these lines, I observed nothing in this group that might pass for an hieroglyphic. After passing this rock the valley gets broader, and, in half an hour more, we came to the broadest part, where the Jebel Nabbeh rises to the right; and here we found numerous inscriptions on the rocks on both sides, as also rude designs of men, with swords, camels, donkeys, and gazelles or ibexes. The inscriptions were generally short, consisting of a single line, or two at most. Among them I noticed three or four in Greek, with the emblem of the cross, evidently of a much more modern date than the majority; and one in Hebrew, originally well cut, but now so defaced that many of the letters are illegible. A certain *Ιωασηφ Μοναχος*, probably one of the fraternity of St. Catherine, has been most indefatigable in adding his name wherever these inscriptions of the olden time are to be found; and many, as little known as he, have followed his example.

“The majority of these inscriptions were on blocks of sandstone, easily accessible from the bed of the wâdy; and, though some were at a considerable



THE WRITTEN VALLEY.

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height above its level, it was not a perpendicular height, but there were either fallen rocks or projecting ledges below them, by standing on which the inscribers could easily have accomplished their purpose; in short, nowhere—Hagar el Nameen excepted—were they at such a height or in such a position as to have required scaffolding for their execution. A few seem to have been incised with great care; others to have been punctured with some pointed instrument, with a view to incision, and never completed; but the vast majority appear to have been originally cut, in a rude and hasty manner, by passing a chisel once along the surface of the rock.”

We have alluded to the Egyptian cartouches. These deserve a somewhat detailed description on account of their undoubted antiquity. The largest tablet is situated at some height from the ground, and near the mouth of a gallery leading to a copper mine, once worked by a colony of Egyptians. It commemorates the conquest of the surrounding country by an early Egyptian king, whose name appears in a cartouche or oval; the word “Tau,” hieroglyphically written by the hand, a bird, and crowns on each side of the royal warrior, signifying mountain lands, and the conqueror’s title, “Lord of Battles, endowed with everlasting life,” appearing in the other devices. There are four figures on the tablet, all of which are said to be personifications of the same hero; and it is noticeable that the central one wears the *double crown*—that is, of both the

Upper and Lower Egyptian kingdoms—proving that at the date when these hieroglyphics were traced Thebes was under the Memphite monarchs.

On a line with this are other, but more decayed and broken, tablets; of which the first represents Sufu beating down an enemy; while Thoth, the Egyptian Mercury, stands by with dog-headed sceptre. In the left hand corner above the king may be traced the figure of a bird, probably of an eagle, signifying Providence; the title on the left of the cartouche is "Priest." Another tablet is characterized with a royal cartouche, and some hieroglyphic titles. A fourth bears the cartouche of an unnamed king, with the customary regal designations; while the hero is shown, armed with his mace, and holding by his hair the bearded enemy whom he has vanquished.

Is it not strange to reflect that these devices must have attracted the gaze of the Israelites as, led by Moses, they descended the Valley of the Writings on their march towards Sinai?

CHAPTER III.

THE ROUTE TO OPHIR.

HAVING fully surveyed the western coast of the peninsula, we shall now direct the reader's attention to the eastern, which is washed by the Gulf of Akabah, or, as it was anciently called, the Ælanitic Gulf. The main interest attaching to the gulf gathers round the Scriptural account of Ophir, which region was accessible to the ships of Solomon and Hiram through this great body of water. Strange to say, Ophir is not mentioned by any Greek or Roman writer. Our only knowledge of it is gathered from the records of Holy Writ, and these records, in some particulars, are, to say the least, obscure. Hence, the different authorities are unable to agree on the exact situation of Ophir. Calmet would fain identify it with Armenia; Hardt, with Phrygia; Olderman, Iberia; Josephus, the Golden Chersonese; Relandus and Ouseley think it to have been Ceylon; Macdonald even ventures to place it in Sumatra; Dupper, Lopez, and Bruce, in Sofala and Mozambique; Montesquieu and D'Anville, on the

eastern coast of Africa.* Ritter mentions certain writers who have looked for Ophir in Peru; while the great navigator Columbus was convinced he had discovered it in the West Indies, and solemnly informed his Government that the "mountain of Sopora [that is, Ophir], which the ships of Solomon were three years in reaching, is in the island of Hayti, and has come with all its treasures into the possession of the King of Spain."

But what *was* Ophir? Emphatically, a land of gold. Its very name was used as a synonym for the precious metal, as in Ps. xlv. 9; Job xxii. 24, xxviii. 16; and Isa. xiii. 12. But it also yielded sandal-wood and precious stones, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. It was a land brimming over with plenteousness; a land of surpassing wealth. Both before and after Solomon's time the gold of Ophir was in repute among the Israelites. References to it are found in the Books of Kings, in the Chronicles, in the Psalms, in Job, and in Isaiah: "I will make a man more precious than fine gold, even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir." Still, it must be owned that the great commercial importance of Ophir appears in all its prominence for the first time during the tranquil and prosperous reign of Solomon, from 1015 B.C. to 975 B.C.

In the First Book of Kings (ix. 26-28) we read: "And king Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-

* Sir Walter Raleigh thought it was one of the Molucca islands.—"History of the World," bk. i. c. 8. Dr. Robertson, the historian, placed it in Africa.

geber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon."

In the following chapter we read: "And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir great plenty of almsg trees [sandalwood], and precious stones." We are further informed that "the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents." And from verse 16 to verse 21 we have the list of targets and shields and other large objects which were manufactured by the Jewish king out of pure gold. No silver was used, for in the reign of this splendid monarch silver was very lightly esteemed: "It was not any thing accounted of in the days of Solomon" (2 Chron. ix. 20).

The opinion of the best modern critics seems to be that Ophir was in Arabia. In the tenth chapter of Genesis it is almost certain that the Ophir mentioned is some city, region, or tribe in Arabia; and it is scarcely less certain that the Ophir of Genesis is the Ophir of the Book of Kings. Now, three places in Arabia may be pointed out, whose names sufficiently agree with the word *Ophir*—namely, Aphur, called Sapphara by Ptolemy, now Zafár or Saphar, which, according to the classical writer Arrian, was the metropolis of the Sabæans, and was distant twelve

days' journey from the emporium Muza on the Red Sea ; Doffir, a city mentioned by Niebuhr the traveller as a considerable town of Yemen, and about fifteen leagues from the sea ; and Zafur, or Zafari, now Dofar, a city on the southern coast of Arabia, visited in the fourteenth century by Ibn Batula, the Arabian traveller, and stated by him to be a month's journey by land from Aden, and a month's voyage, when the wind was fair, from the Indian shore.

Other considerations may be adduced in favour of the opinion that Ophir was some country or town in Arabia.

No fewer than four ancient writers represent Arabia as producing gold ; namely, the geographer Agatharchides, who lived in the second century before Christ ; the geographer Artemidorus, who flourished somewhat later ; Diodorus Siculus, the historian ; and Pliny the Elder.

Again : Eupolemus, a Greek historian, who lived before the Christian era, and who wrote a work on the kings of Judea, expressly states, as quoted by Eusebius, that Ophir was an island with gold mines in the Erythrean Sea, and that David sent miners thither in vessels, which he caused to be built at *Ælana*, or *Elath*.

Lastly : even admitting, notwithstanding the weight of these ancient authorities, that gold never really existed in Arabia, or in any island along its coasts, why may we not conclude that Ophir was an Arabian emporium or depôt, whither gold, and sandal-wood,

and peacocks were brought as articles of commerce, and thence exported into Judea? There is not a word in the Bible to militate against this supposition, while there is almost a direct intimation that Ophir *was* in Arabia; and surely it is more rational, more conclusive, and less audacious than the conjecture that Solomon's ships would venture as far as the great ports of India?

The principal objection to it is, that a voyage to any port in Arabia could hardly have occupied so long a period as three years. But those who advance such an objection forget the difficult navigation of the Gulf of Akabah and the Red Sea; the timidity of the ancient mariners; and the indifferent construction of their ships. And it must be remembered, says Seetzen, that the Arabian sailors even now have to creep slowly from port to port. The Tyrians certainly would not be more adventurous, while at every port it was then necessary to tarry for a considerable period, and, perhaps, even to fish for pearls. Take the following illustration from Homer's "Odyssey:"—*

"Lingered they then for a full twelvemonth on the island,
Many good wares in the ship's spacious belly concealing."

The following remarks by Mr. Twisleton may be quoted as summing up the argument in favour of Arabia:—

"It may be observed," he says, "that objections against Ophir being in Arabia, grounded on the fact

* Homer, "Odyssey," book xv., l. 454.


that no gold has been discovered in Arabia in the present day, seem decisively answered by the parallel case of Sheba. In the Seventy-second Psalm, verse 15, 'gold of Sheba,' translated in the English Psalter 'gold of Arabia,' is spoken of just as 'gold of Ophir' is spoken of in other parts of the Old Testament; and in Ezekiel's account of the trade with Tyre (xxvii. 22), it is stated, 'The merchants of Sheba and Raamah, they were thy merchants: they occupied in thy fairs with chief of all spices, and with all precious stones, and gold;' just as in 1 Kings x. precious stones and gold are said to have been brought from Ophir by the navy of Solomon and of Hiram. Now, of two things one is true. Either the gold of Sheba and the precious stones sold to the Tyrians by the merchants of Sheba were the natural productions of Sheba, and in this case—as the Sheba here spoken of was confessedly in Arabia—the assertion that Arabia did not produce gold falls to the ground; or the merchants of Sheba obtained precious stones and gold in such quantities by trade, that they became noted for supplying them to the Tyrians and Jews, without curious inquiry by the Jews as to the precise locality whence these commodities were originally derived. And exactly similar remarks may apply to Ophir. The resemblance seems complete. In answer to objections against the obvious meaning of the tenth chapter of Genesis, the alternative may be stated as follows:— Either Ophir, although in Arabia, produced gold and precious stones; or, if it shall be hereafter proved

in the progress of geological investigation that this could not have been the case, Ophir furnished gold and precious stones *as an emporium*, although the Jews were not careful to ascertain and record the fact."

At all events, the ships of Hiram and Solomon, on their way to the golden Ophir, must have ploughed the waters of the Gulf of Akabah.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EAST COAST OF THE SINAITIC PENINSULA.

S already stated, the arm of the Red Sea which encloses on the east the great Sinaitic peninsula is now known as the Gulf of Akabah. It was comparatively unknown to Europeans until examined by the traveller Ruppell in 1826, and more closely surveyed by the English hydrographers, Moresby and Wellsted, in 1830 to 1833.

Starting from Ras Mohammed, in a northerly direction, the eastern coast is rocky, broken, irregular, but not unromantic ; having in its middle part a deep bay, or basin, approached by two small coves or inlets, the Sherm Sheikh and Sherm el Moyah. The name "sherm" means a break or rift, and is applied to an arm of the sea in which the rocks are so broken as to afford safe anchorage to vessels. The first of the sherms receives what we may call its specific designation from a sheikh who died in the odour of sanctity, and whose memory is greatly venerated by the Arabs ; the other is so called from a contiguous spring of brackish water.

The coast itself is covered, we are told, with a confused mass of broken hills; which, when they come in contact with the sea, divide into small ridges, opposing bare and precipitous cliffs to the assault of the billows. Above the sherms, the land rises gradually for several miles, approaching by a series of terraces the grand mountain-range which forms the backbone, as it were, of the peninsula, and stretches away into the obscure horizon in a succession of conspicuous and majestic peaks.

Little need be said about the more southern of the two sherms; it is simply a little circular cove, with very deep water in the centre, and well protected against the north wind. The other sherm is much larger, and much better protected against *all* winds. A channel, measuring a mile in breadth, leads from it into the harbour. It is much frequented by pilgrims who desire to cross the peninsula, taking Mount Sinai in their route. There are always to be found in the neighbourhood encampments of Mezeine and Aleygat Arabs, ready to furnish the traveller with an escort.

Three distinct routes lead from the Gulf of Akabah to that great cynosure of pilgrims, the convent at Sinai—namely, from Wâdy Nabk or Sherm, from Minna Dahab, and from el-Nuweibi. The first has been explored by Burckhardt (1816), Laborde (1828), and Wellsted (1833). The second, by Ruppell (1826), and Laborde (1829). The third, and most popular, being, in fact, the natural communication between

Mount Sinai and Akabah, Petra and Palestine, was opened up by Seetzen in 1810, and examined by Burckhardt (1816), Ruppell (1822), Collier and Von Schubert (1837), and Dr. Robinson (1838).

Baron Koller, in 1840, struck out a more direct route, coinciding for about two-thirds of the distance with the former, but afterwards leading through a difficult country: it is very little used.

We shall trace very briefly each of these four routes.

The first leads along the shore for some distance towards Wâdy Nabk, and then strikes to the north-west through the rugged mountain-passes. The scenery is everywhere of the most majestic, though, occasionally, of a somewhat savage character. In some of the valleys abundant pasturage is found, and the Wâdy Kyd is described as of surprising fertility, producing not only the indigenous trees and shrubs of the Desert, but dates and onions, and that species of hemp from which the Oriental stimulant *hasheesh* is obtained. This route may be traversed in about three days and a half.

The second starts from Dahab, Musa or Minna Dahab, which is famous for its luxurious groves of date-palms. Some mounds of earth in the neighbourhood, each about five feet high, are called by the Arabs "the Graves of the Nazarenes" (or Christians). Carless suggests that as the palms of Dahab have from

time immemorial belonged to the monks of Sinai, some of them who have been stationed there to gather the harvest, may have died before their work was ended, and been interred on the spot.

Several travellers identify Dahab with the Eziongeber of Scripture. Not only, as Ritter points out, does the meaning of the name of the place (that is, "gold") seem to confirm the theory, but the commodiousness and natural advantages of the harbour apparently recommend it as the site of a commercial town. A sharp coral reef running out from the place, and curving round the harbour on the north, bears a resemblance likewise to the object after which Eziongeber was named, a human backbone. Wellsted remarks that even if this were not the site of the ancient sea-port of Solomon's navy, the dangerous reef already described may have been a great obstacle to navigation, and the scene of the wreck of the great fleet which Jehoshaphat equipped to send to Ophir (see 1 Kings xxii. 48; 2 Chron. xx. 36, 37; and 1 Kings ix. 26-28). This, however, is not a very probable conjecture.

From Dahab to Sinai the traveller passes through a succession of wādys which require no special description.

The third and most popular route conducts the traveller along the shore of the gulf from Akabah, at its northern extremity, to Nuweibi, and thence, by a circuitous track, to Mount Sinai. It was traversed

by Burckhardt in the *opposite* direction, and in the following notes we take Burckhardt as our guide.

After leaving the convent of Sinai, and passing the important spring of Abou Szoueyr,* Burckhardt ascended a hilly country for half an hour. A short descent brought him to the boundary of the district of Sinai proper, and he then traversed a wide and open plain of great elevation, which forms the watershed between the Gulf of Akabah and the Gulf of Suez. In an hour and a half he entered the narrow valley which Dean Stanley calls Wâdy Sal; a valley formed by the lower ridges of the primitive mountains. At the summit the stratum was granite; somewhat lower down greenstone and porphyry made their appearance; and lower still, only greenstone was seen. The lower mountains of Sinai are of more regular outline than the upper: they are less rugged, have no insulated peaks, and their summits fall into acute curves.

Descending the Wâdy Sal for seven hours, Burckhardt emerged upon an open plain. This was quickly crossed, and the traveller then entered the shadows of another valley. The descent was very rapid, and in two hours he reached the lower level, where calcareous and sandstone rocks begin.

The next day Burckhardt continued his journey over the plain called Haydar, where, in the opinion of Schubert, the Israelites planted their first encampment after leaving Mount Sinai; and where, after

* The *Abou Suweireh* of Dr. Robinson.

sighing for the flesh-pots of Egypt, and murmuring against Moses, a shower of quails was sent to their relief.

“It is a singular fact,” says Ritter,* “that Schubert [and Dean Stanley†] saw the sky filled with innumerable birds at the very same spot. It has been conjectured that, in that strict connection which often is found between the natural and supernatural, the judgment of God upon the Israelites may have been in strict accordance with universal laws, and the mortality among them traceable to general grounds. The people having for so long a time not tasted flesh, may have shown such greed at the unexpected arrival of the quails, that, according to some authorities, their unrestrained appetite may have been the occasion of their death.”

We see no necessity, however, for thus endeavouring to explain away the supernatural. The journey of the Israelites through the Wilderness was, in all respects, miraculous. Special sins God visited with special punishments; and assuredly He who makes laws can at His will suspend their operation.

From the plain of Haydar the traveller descends into a chalky valley, and then enters a rugged water-course lying between low hills of sandstone. Next, he crosses a rough and rocky plain, everywhere broken up by torrents and ravines. In a lateral valley lies the well Hadhra, which is supposed to be the *Hazereth*

* Ritter, “Comparative Geography,” p. 61.

† Dean Stanley, “Sinai and Palestine,” p. 82.

mentioned in Numbers xxxiii. 17, where Miriam was afflicted with leprosy, and where the people tarried seven days (Numbers xi. 35; xii. 15, 16).

Continuing his journey, Burckhardt traversed Wâdy Rahab, a fine valley with many syal trees, and soon afterwards entered another valley, broader than the former, which, however, was little better than a scene of bleak desolation. "Not the smallest green leaf could be discovered; and the thorny mimosa, which retains its verdure in the tropical deserts of Nubia with very little supply of moisture, was here entirely withered." Through Wâdy Sumghy and Wâdy Bozeira the traveller descended, the latter part of his course running through the bed of a torrent called Saada, which brought him to a chain of precipitous greenstone rocks, hemming in the valley so closely as to leave in several places a passage of only ten feet in width. After proceeding a mile through this majestic ravine, he caught the first glimpse of the Gulf of Akabah; the valley then gradually broadens and slopes down to the beach, which is here several hundred paces in breadth. Greenstone and granite rocks bound this deep defile on either hand. Some groves of date-trees are situated close to the shore, among which is a well of brackish but drinkable water; the place is called el-Nuweibi.

Baron Koller's route (in March 1840) may be described in a few sentences. As we have said, for

TRAVELLING IN THE DESERT



two-thirds of the distance he traversed the usual road to Akabah by way of Nuweibi. After passing el-Ain and the mouth of the Wâdy Wetir, he entered upon new ground; but this new ground is of a very tame and monotonous character,—a succession of barren wâdys, low hills, and treeless plains, which possess no features either of beauty or grandeur.

In the northern portion of the Gulf of Akabah we shall find some objects of interest; or at least *two* places which recall to us the associations of three important historical epochs. The first epoch is that of the long march of the Israelites from Egypt into Palestine; the second, that of the glorious reigns of David and Solomon; and the third, that of medieval development and the Byzantine supremacy.

The sea-port of Akabah, situated at the head of the waters of the Red Sea, must always have been a centre of commercial enterprise. But it would seem to have reached the climax of its prosperity at the time of Solomon; afterwards, it was overshadowed by its successful rival, Elath. Azariah restored it to his nation, and rebuilt it, after it had been captured by the Edomites (2 Kings xiv. 22), about 800 B.C. Some five years later it was conquered by Rezin, king of Syria, who expelled the Jewish inhabitants, and peopled it with Syrians (2 Kings xvi. 6). Many Jews, however, returned to it, and lived on terms of amity with their Syrian masters; and this good feel-

ing prevailed after the city had passed into the hands of the Mohammedans.

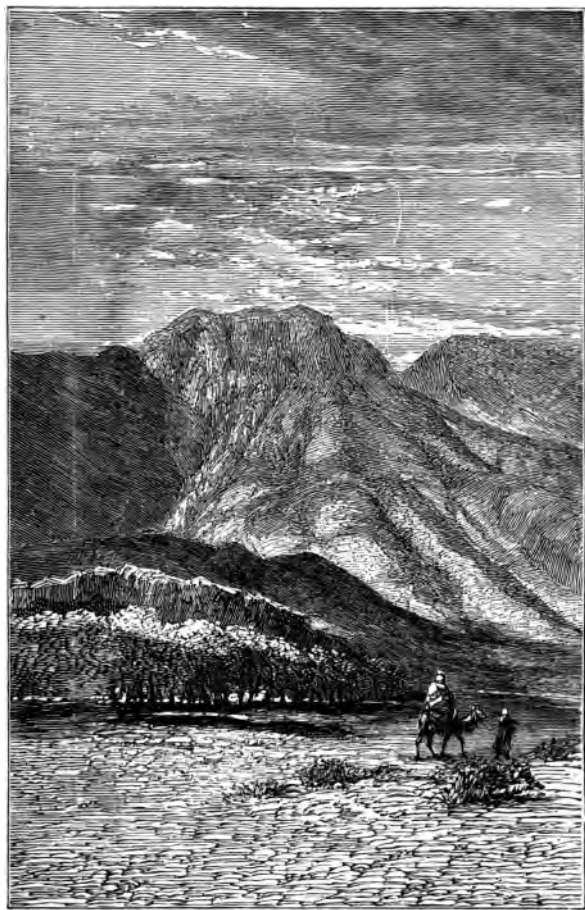
At present the traveller's attention will be directed to the fortress or citadel on the mainland, and the ruins on the island lying almost opposite to it.

The island is known by the name of Faroun or Pharaoh, and an old Arabian tradition tells of an Egyptian monarch who perished there. Ritter observes that the tradition may not be without a substratum of fact, inasmuch as an interchange of the names of Jehoshaphat and Pharaoh may have taken place, and that the ancient story may allude to the wreck of the king's fleet on the rocks of Ezion-geber.

The ruins on the island date back to the twelfth century, and appear to have been erected by Saladin, though the building called by the Arabs ed-Deir, "the convent," is reputed to be of Christian origin.

Faroun itself lies eight miles from the northern extremity of the gulf, and very near the western coast. It measures about four hundred paces in length, and consists of two rounded hills, each about one hundred and fifty feet high, which a low sandy isthmus links together. The whole is surrounded by a massive wall, which at each angle is defended by a square tower. The channel between the coast and the island is very narrow; and yet, as it is sheltered both from the northern and southern winds, it furnishes the safest harbour north of Dahab.

On the summit of the northern hill an area of about



WADY ITHM.



three hundred and sixty feet in length by ninety feet in breadth is enclosed by a wall. Here are several square buildings, separated from each other by thick masonry. Wellsted, the traveller, entering one of these, found an arched chamber, whose ceiling rested upon a couple of arches, with the additional support of a Doric column in the middle.

The southern hill is covered with a pile of shapeless ruins, out of which it is impossible for the liveliest imagination to frame any distinct plan.

The castle on the mainland has been fully described by Dr. Robinson. Its interior is occupied by several apartments for corn and stores. The roof is flat. Round about it are raised several palm-covered huts for the accommodation of the garrison. The date of its erection is uncertain; but there can be no doubt that it was originally built for the protection of the Mecca pilgrims. Its garrison at present is composed of about forty ill-disciplined Bedaween.

It is situated on the eastern slope of the Wâdy el Arabah, on a gravelly slope, which rises abruptly to the range of mountains on the east. Its walls are thirty feet high, and consist of alternate layers of red and white stones. There is a good well, abundant in supply and excellent in quality.*

North of the fortress opens the Wady Ithm, leading into the Wâdy Arabah, the pass which the Israelites traversed as they came down from the broad valley, and skirted the mountains on the east: "And they

Dr. Robinson, "Biblical Researches," i. 170-174.

journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom" (Num. xxi. 4). It was here that the Lord sent fiery serpents among the Israelites, and they bit the people, and "much people of Israel" died.

CHAPTER V.

THE GROUP OF THE JEBEL MUSA.

THE mountains of the Sinaitic Peninsula may be classified into two main groups, those of Sinai and Serbal. Let us first direct the reader's attention to the former; premising that the Sinai group occupies the centre of the peninsula, while the Serbal group is situated to the north-west.

But in using this nomenclature we are taking it for granted that the reader agrees with ourselves in identifying *Jebel Mûsa* with Mount Sinai, the "Mountain of God." This is now the accepted theory of the best authorities, but Lepsius and others long persisted in looking upon Mount Serbal as Sinai, notwithstanding the many points of difference between its natural features and those described in the Mosaic chronicle.

When the Israelites arrived at the plain of *Mûrkâh*, or the "Wilderness of Sin," they may have advanced by one of three routes: namely, by the northern route, to *Tûr*, and thence by the valley called *Wâdy Hebrân*, and the *Nûkb Hawy*, to *Jebel*

Músa ; by the central, that is, through the successive valleys of the Wády Shellál, the Nükb Badera, and the Wády Mukatteb, to the Wády Feirán, and its great mountain, Serbal ; or by the southern, through the Wády Shellál, the Nükb Badera, and the Wádys Mukatteb, Feirán, and es-Sheikh, to Jebel Músa. For various reasons it would seem improbable that they took either the northern or the southern route. But if they followed up the second, would it not lead them to Serbal ; and in that case must not Serbal be regarded as the Sinai of Exodus ? Not at all. There is good ground for believing that Serbal is identical with Horeb, which Josephus describes as "the loftiest of the region," and "with good grass growing round it." But it must be confessed that early traditions and the weight of such authorities as Eusebius, Jerome, and Cosmas, are in favour of Serbal as Sinai. The question remains, then, Why put aside tradition and authority, and decide in favour of Jebel Músa ?

The proper solution seems to be that which Ritter suggests ; namely, that Serbal may have been the "Mountain of God" mentioned in Exodus iii. 1, the sanctuary of the heathen tribes of the desert, already invested with sanctity prior to the migration of the Israelites into Egypt, and the shrine to which they were going, as Pharaoh would suppose, their long journey into the wilderness for sacrifice. It may then have been—to quote Dean Stanley*—the Wády

* Stanley "Sinai and Palestine," pp. 40-42.

Feirân that witnessed the great battle of Rephidim, the erection of the altar on the hill, and the visit of Jethro ; and from hence, "in the third month," after a long interval of rest, the tribes may again have moved forward to Sinai,—that is, the clustered mountain-peaks of Jebel Mûsa.

By this solution we gain two points : first, that we are able to identify Jebel Mûsa with Sinai, and avoid the difficulty, otherwise considerable, that the narrative brings the Israelites through the two most striking features of the desert, Wâdy Feirân and Serbal, without any notice of the fact ; and secondly, that it provides a suitable arena for the encampment at Rephidim, "the most remarkable which occurred before the final one in front of Sinai itself."

"In Exodus xvii. 9, 10, in the account of the battle of Rephidim, the word used is *gibeah*, rightly translated 'hill.' Every one who has seen the valley of Feirân will at once recognize the propriety of the term, if applied to the rocky eminence which commands the palm-grove, and on which in early Christian times, stood the church and palace of the Bishops of Paran. Thus, if we can attach any credence to the oldest known tradition of the peninsula, that Rephidim is the same as Paran, then Rephidim, 'the resting-places,' is the natural name for the paradise of the Bedaween in the adjacent palm-grove ; then the hill of the Church of Paran may fairly be imagined to be 'the hill' on which Moses stood, deriving its earliest consecration from

the altar which he built; the Amalekites may thus have naturally fought for the oasis of the desert, and the sanctuary of their gods; and Jethro may well have found his kinsmen encamping, after their long journey, amongst the palms 'before the Mount of God,' and acknowledged that the Lord was greater even than all the gods who had from ancient days been thought to dwell on the lofty peaks which overhung their encampment. And then the ground is clear for the second start, described in the following chapter: 'They departed from Rephidim, and came to the Desert of Sinai, and pitched in the wilderness, and there Israel encamped before the mount.'

The Convent of St. Catherine, with its immediately adjacent peak, the "Sinai" of the monks, the Tor Sina of the Arabs, the Jebel Mûsa or "Mount of Moses" in a limited sense, forms only a part of the Jebel Mûsa or "Mountains of Moses" in a larger and more comprehensive sense; but then, this small part is better known, and is the most conspicuous point in every description of the group. It forms the northernmost extremity of the whole; its northern base resting on the plain er-Râhah, at an elevation of 4000 feet above the sea. Towards the north-west this lofty plateau or table-land merges into narrow and extremely rugged mountain passes; but on the north-north-east it widens out into the "broad cleft" of el-Sheikh, whose eastern extremity, at Abu Suweireh, is 4005 feet above the ocean.

Keeping a north-westerly course, we afterwards come, by a continuous descent, to the Wâdy Selâf, which is only 2709 feet above the sea. This ravine, however, is not properly included in the Sinai group, but forms the medium of transition to the Wâdy Feirân, and, therefore, the link between the two groups of Sinai and Serbal. Contracting at a point called el-Bueb (*bab*, door) to a breadth of about twenty feet, the Feirân opens into the wide Wâdy el-Sheikh. Hence, in a noble curve to the north-east, the Wâdy Selâf sweeps round to Sinai; but its course is a continual ascent, and grows difficult and rugged as it approaches the narrow ravines at its end. Then, at the Nakb Egani, the lofty mountain-chain begins, and stretches far away to the south-east as free as the grand bold mass of the Sijmeh.

At the southern extremity the lofty chain includes the magnificent cone of Om Shomar, which, with its precipitous sides, and its ponderous buttresses, forms the keystone of the group. It has been ascended by no other traveller than Burckhardt, and it is to him that we owe our most accurate information regarding the whole mountain-mass.

Between the Om Shomar at the south, and the consecrated peak of Sinai at the north, lies, in a direct line, and almost exactly midway, a third great landmark, Mount St. Catherine, with its convent, forming the true centre of what we may call the Mosaic mountains. How far the range extends towards the east and south-east we cannot so well

determine ; but, taking Dr. Robinson as our authority, we consider the Jebel Fera, Um Lanz, Um Alawy, and Ras el Ferush, to be the outposts on the north-east, and the porphyritic and granite mountains of Mordam and Mahala on the south-east. A high, massive, yet narrow branch of the range trends away southward in the direction of Sherm.

The traveller who approaches Sinai, either by way of Wâdy Feirân or Wâdy Hebrân is compelled, of course, to traverse the steep passes lying between Sinai and Serbal. Entering the central mountain district, the peaks increase in height as we advance towards the south. The plain or Wâdy er-Râhah lies, it is supposed, about 4000 feet above the sea-level ; the Convent of St. Catherine, 4725 feet ; the summit of Sinai, 7097 feet ; that of Mount Catherine, 8168 feet ; while Om Shomar probably attains an altitude of 9000 feet.

The gradual ascent towards the sacred mountain, the Mountain of the Lord, is very graphically described by a recent traveller.* On the 16th of March, he says, at an early hour, the rising sun was just lighting up the peaks of the mountains ; the birds were singing their matins merrily ; the view behind was closed by the noble peaks of the Serbâl ; but five or six of the neighbouring summits towered up in the early dawn, reddish-brown in colour, and with deep blue shadows. Each one of these peaks was broken up into a number of pinnacles, which

* Earl of Crawford, "Letters from the Holy Land."

declined in height towards the west. Leaving the more accessible and easy route of the Wâdy Sheikh on the left, we took our course through the much less picturesque Wâdy Selâf. The pasturage in it for sheep and goats, which are under the care of Bedaween shepherdesses, is excellent. Here our travellers saw the rethem, its white flower delicately streaked with purple; the selleh, with leaves of the brightest green, bearing a graceful flower of a light pink colour, richly streaked inside; also the deep green ooraga, and hundreds of sand-coloured lizards which the Bedaween call *sorebani*. "We passed," says Lord Crawford, "five hours on this part of the way, from six to eleven, till we reached the foot of Jebel How (el-Hawi), at which point the steep ascent begins. The path, passing through one of the most extraordinary defiles that I have ever seen, and rudely paved in the steepest parts, leads directly to Mount Sinai. The groups of camels slowly defiling along, at different heights of the ravine, and sometimes in different directions, were highly picturesque. After three hours' climbing, we arrived at the summit, and our first view of Sinai was gained; the side facing us bearing not that name, however, but Jebel Shereyk. The broad plain er-Râhah slopes to the very base."

The mountain lifteth up its giant head
 Half wreathed in morning's dimly-circling mist,—
 Now changing into gold, now amethyst,
 And now swift-flashing with a glowing red :
 As if it would do homage to the star
 Which rises in the orient sea afar.

The mountain of Sinai may briefly be described as a lofty table-land surrounded by still loftier peaks. That which commands the most extensive prospect is strewn with charred boulders, as if it had been riven and broken up by an earthquake. A vast cleft divides it into two summits. In all probability, then, this is the Râs Süfsâfeh, the "Mountain of the Law." The plain beneath it, the enclosed plain in front of its magnificent cliffs, was the site of the Israelite encampment, and a grander locality it is difficult to imagine. The "awful and lengthened approach" to it, as to some natural sanctuary, was a fit preparation for the terrors of the coming scene. The low line of alluvial mounds at the base of the cliff correspond with the "bounds" which were to prevent the people from "touching the mount." The plain itself is not, says Stanley, broken, and uneven, and narrowly hemmed in, like almost all others in the range, but presents a long receding curve, against which the people could "remove and stand afar off." The cliff, towering like a huge altar in front of the worshipping, awe-struck multitude, and sharply marked out against the sky from every point of the wide plain, must remind the traveller of "the mount that might be touched," and from which the "voice" of God broke in its awful thunders on the silence beneath and around.

Here, then, is the sanctuary of the Sinaitic peninsula, its "holy of holies," screened from the world



THE RAS SUFSAFEH AND PLAIN OF ER-RAHAM.

1

by a ring of majestic peaks, and shut up in its own solitude, as it were, for ever.

And as in the Wâdy Feirân, says the authority already quoted,* "the hill of Paran" may be taken as fixing with some degree of probability the scene of Rephidim, so there are some details of the plain of er-Râhah which remarkably coincide with the scene of the worship of the golden calf, evidently the same as that of the encampment at the time of the delivery of the Law. "In this instance the traditional locality is happily chosen. A small eminence at the entrance of the convent-valley is marked by the name of Aaron, as being that from which Aaron surveyed the festival on the wide plain below. This tradition, if followed out, would of necessity require the encampment to be in the Wâdy er-Râhah, as every other circumstance renders probable. But there are two other points which meet here, and nowhere else: First, Moses is described as descending the mountain without seeing the people; the shout strikes the ear of his companion before they ascertain the cause; the view bursts upon him suddenly as he draws nigh to the camp, and he throws down the tables, and dashes them in pieces 'beneath the mount' (Ex. xxxii. 15-19). Such a combination might occur in the Wâdy er-Râhah....Further, we are told that Moses strewed the powder of the fragments of the idol on the 'waters' of the 'brook that came down out of the mount.' This would be perfectly possible

* Dean Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," pp 43, 44.

in the Wâdy er-Râhah, into which issues the brook of the Wâdy Lejá, descending, it is true, from Mount St. Catherine, but still in sufficiently close connection with the Jebel Mûsa to justify the expression, 'Coming down out of the mount.' These two coincidences would not occur either at Serbal or in the Wâdy Sebayeh. In the case of the former, although there is the brook from the Wâdy Aleyat, there is no corresponding contiguity of the encampment. In the case of the latter, both are wanting."

We must now ask the reader to accompany us in the ascent of the principal mountains of the Sinai group, namely—Om Shomar, St. Catherine, Horeb, and Sinai.

ASCENT OF OM SHOMAR.

In ascending this, the loftiest of the Arabian mountains, we can have no better guide than the traveller Burckhardt. Let us follow in his footsteps.

He left the Convent of St. Catherine on the 22nd of May 1826, starting in the night, that he might not arouse the jealous suspicions of a number of wild Bedaween in the vicinity; and he took with him his guide Haned and two of the convent Arabs.

The monks had informed him that they frequently heard remarkable noises in the direction of Om Shomar—noises, they said, not unlike repeated discharges of artillery, but unaccompanied with any "rumblings of the earth," as at Sinai. Burckhardt's explanation of the phenomenon did not satisfy so

ignorant and superstitious a body of men ; and his visit was stimulated, therefore, by a desire to learn the facts of the case, as well as by a wish to discover the geography of the southern peninsula.

Taking the open path over Mount Sebayeh, and then bearing a little to the west, he ascended the Wâdy Owass and the Wâdy Rahab. On his way he passed a group of the rude stone hovels which the Bedaween erect in solitary places for the storage of their supplies. They are about ten feet high, are constructed of rough stones, and usually occur in clusters of about a dozen each. Their roofs are very slightly put together with sticks ; their doors, also made of sticks, are so frail that a single blow of a stone would force an entrance. Yet the Bedaween, like the Highlanders, are so honourable in their mutual relations, that theft is unknown among them ; and the huts remain intact, though frequently containing articles of real value, shawls, and money.

Burckhardt occupied eight hours in reaching the foot of the mountain. The latter part of his course he describes as enlivened by romantic landscapes, the rocks being piled up in the most fantastic groups, and interspersed with graceful clumps of palms. In about an hour, as he toiled up the acclivity, he encountered the remains of the ancient convent of Antus, which was inhabited so late as the beginning of the eighteenth century. To the actual summit of Om Shomar he was unable to ascend, the last few hundred feet towering aloft in utterly inaccessible preci-

pices. But at the elevation which he *did* reach he was able to make so large a circuit as to obtain a magnificent and richly-coloured panoramic prospect, embracing the Gulf of Suez, the harbour of Tûr, and the picturesque littoral belt of el-Kâ'a.

Om Shomar is composed of granite—white at the top, and red at the bottom. Hence, at a distance, it resembles chalk, being largely composed of feldspar.

We may add that, in February 1862, three Englishmen accomplished the ascent of Om Shomar. Their narrative is included in a paper on Sinai, to be found in "Vacation Tourists" (London, 1864), but it contains no particulars of interest. The following is the only important passage:—

"There is no real difficulty in the ascent of Om Shomar, except at the *cheminée*—like that on the Brevent, but worse—which leads up the Hadjar el Bint, or Maiden Stone, a kind of Jungfrau, which had hitherto repelled all comers. But the last peak of a high mountain is generally one of its most difficult points. Witness the Mur de la Côte on Mont Blanc, and the last rocks on Monte Rosa. But though without risk, the whole climb was laborious to a degree. The debris of a Swiss mountain are very often partly covered with vegetation, or at least secured in their places by growth of moss and lichen. But on these hills all is bare, sharp granite, or volcanic rock, displaced, or *in situ*; and the whole

ascent of the great ravine, which leads up to the chine and central peak of Om Shomar, is one mass of huge, insecure fragments of syenite, lying on an extremely abrupt slope. There was plenty of snow in the clefts of the mountain, but it gave no assistance on the steep *éboulement* our friends had to mount. Both were good and tried hill-men, and neither spoke of it as otherwise than severe work. Their scanty breakfast at 3.30 A.M. carried them on to the base of Om Shomar itself in about three hours and forty minutes. Then began a hard monotonous scramble to the foot of the central peak, and the ridge or backbone of the mountain, and so to the foot of the Hadjar el Bint—the *Mauvais Pas* of the highest or western peak—in about two hours. Here Saleh, the guide, at last found a narrow *cheminée*, and mounted first, giving a hand to the others. Once past this, a few minutes sufficed to land them on the summit of Om Shomar. The southward view is very grand, over Ras Mohammed and the expanse of the Red Sea (one never realizes its breadth from the map). Eastward and westward the eye takes nearly the same range as from the top of Mount St. Catherine, but that mountain conceals most things to the northward. Immediately below them all was chaos,—sheets of snow or large deep drifts, the smooth steep rocks on which they were standing, and below these steep crevasse-like gorges. Thick mist soon rose to the southward, and spoiled the view in part; but the deed was done, and the great mountain vanquished for

the first time by a European. The chine of the mountain had been reached [as we have seen] by Burckhardt; and in 1861 the Messrs. Hewlett had got to the foot of the Hadjar el Bint the year before, but had failed to find the passage, or found it impracticable."

The whole time occupied in the expedition was: from Wâdy Rahab to the ridge opposite Om Shomar, three hours; descent to the base of Om Shomar, thirty-five minutes; and from the base of Om Shomar to the summit, two hours.

ASCENT OF MOUNT ST. CATHERINE.

Pococke ascribes the name of this singular peak to an old legend respecting the bones of St. Catherine. She was put to death in Alexandria, by order of the Emperor Maxentius, in 307. She was sentenced to die on the wheel; but, in order that her bones might not be broken, the intended instrument of martyrdom miraculously fell to pieces. She was then beheaded, dying calmly, but with a prayer on her lips that her virgin body might not fall into the polluting hands of unbelievers. And her prayer was answered. Immediately on her death her bones were wafted through the air to the summit of this mountain, and buried there by unseen hands. Afterwards, on the erection of the convent, they were transferred to a suitable shrine, and the name of the convent was changed in consequence from that of the Transfiguration to that of St. Catherine.

The ascent of the mountain has been accomplished by a host of travellers. Let us follow first in the footsteps of the German Seetzen.

It was on the 14th of April 1807 that Seetzen left the Convent of el-Arbain and began the ascent of the wild rocky gorge of the Ledja. He found it less precipitous than the acclivity of Horeb, but more difficult, from the lack of steps for the feet. After traversing masses of porphyry, jasper, and a very fine-grained granite, he reached a high steep rock, in whose immediate vicinity flows the *Ain el Shonnar*, or the "Spring of the Partridge," remarkable neither for quantity nor quality. In about an hour and a half he arrived at a more open spot, planted with bushes, and fresh with verdure. The remainder of the ascent he found comparatively easy. On the very summit were the ruins of a small edifice, built of rough stones laid carelessly upon one another. It was called the Chapel of St. Catherine. The entire area of the summit, so far as it was level, did not measure more than twice the dimensions of the ruin. The stone was a hard, fine-grained granite; and the monks looked to find in it "the clear traces, on a colossal scale, of the place where the martyr's bones had been laid." As the day was cloudy, Seetzen did not obtain any idea of the magnificent prospect which the mountain-peak commands, though he caught through the cloud-rifts an occasional glimpse of the far-shining sea.

Next, let us take Burckhardt as our companion.* He ascended the mountain in 1816.

Starting on his expedition as the glories of noon were melting into the softer splendours of evening, he halted near a small well, and in the neighbourhood of some Arab huts, to clear a place among the rocks, and make his encampment for the night. The well is called Bir Shonnar, from the circumstance that a monk, while wandering among the mountain-recesses, and nearly dying of thirst, discovered it miraculously, through seeing a *shonnar*, or partridge, flying towards it. Burckhardt describes it as closely hemmed in by rocks, and states that it does not exceed a foot in diameter, and as much in depth. According to the Bedaween, it never dries up, and its water, even when exposed to the sun, is cold as ice. Several trees contribute to its pleasantness, and, amongst others, the *zorm*, whose fruit, of the size of a small cherry, has a strawberry-like flavour.

Burckhardt bought a lamb of the Bedaween, which he and his party roasted among the rocks; and although, he says, there were only two women and one girl present, and the abrupt declivity of the mountain rendered it difficult for a person to stand up with firmness, yet the greater part of the night was spent in the merry performance of the *mesâmer*, or national song and dance, to which several other Arabs were invited. The air was delightful and cool. The fierce breath of the simoom never reaches these

* Burckhardt, "Travels in Syria and the Holy Land," pp. 569-578.

elevated regions. In winter the whole of the upper Sinai is thickly clothed in snow, which chokes up many of the passes, and frequently renders the Mountains of Moses and St. Catherine inaccessible.

Before sunrise, on the following morning, Burckhardt resumed the ascent. The side of Jebel Katerin, he remarks, is famous for its excellent pasturage: herbs spring up in every chink and cranny of the rock; and as many of them are odoriferous, the perfume, in the first dewy hours of morning, is most delightful. The *zattar** is specially abundant, and is much esteemed as the best possible food for sheep. In the month of June, when the herbs are in blossom, the monks resort to this and the neighbouring mountains for the purpose of collecting various species, which they carefully dry and send to the convent at Cairo. Thence they are despatched to the Archbishop of Sinai at Constantinople, who distributes them to his friends and dependants. It is believed that they possess high sanative properties.

As he approached the summit of the mountain, he saw at a distance a small flock of mountain goats browsing among the rocks. One of his Arab attendants left him, and by a widely circuitous road endeavoured to get to leeward of them, and within range of musket shot. He had nearly reached a favourable spot, when the wind suddenly changed; they smelt him, and took to flight.

After a slow ascent of two hours, Burckhardt

* *Ocimum satarhendi*.

gained the lofty crest of Mount St. Catherine, which, like that of the Jebel Músa, terminates in a sharp point. Its highest part consists of a single immense block of granite, of so smooth a surface as to render its ascent very difficult. Luxuriant vegetation spreads up to this rock, and the mountain side is rich in a pleasant verdure, which, had it been of turf instead of shrubs and bushes, would have completed the resemblance of this mountain to some of the Alpine summits.

The crest of the Jebel Katerin presents no remarkable or interesting object except a small church or chapel, hardly high enough within to allow a person to stand upright, and badly built of loose uncemented stones (this is the chapel which Seetzen visited). The floor is in the bare rock, in which, solid as it is, the body of St. Catherine is believed to have been miraculously buried by angels after her martyrdom at Alexandria.

From this elevated point Burckhardt enjoyed a view of great extent and grandeur; and was able to trace, as in a map, the direction of the surrounding mountain-chains. The upper nucleus of the Sinai, composed almost entirely of granite, forms a rocky wilderness, of an irregular circular shape, intersected by many narrow valleys, and measuring from thirty to forty miles in diameter. It contains the loftiest mountains of the peninsula, whose sharp, shaggy peaks, and steep and broken sides, render it clearly distinguishable from all the rest of the country in view.

It is within this highest region of the peninsula that the fertile valleys are found which produce fruit-trees. They lie principally to the west and south-west of the convent, at three or four hours' distance. Water, too, is always abundant in this district; wherefore it is the place of refuge of all the Bedaween when the lowlands are parched up.

This upper country, or wilderness, is, in Burckhardt's opinion, the Sinaitic Desert so frequently mentioned in the Biblical narrative of the Wanderings of the Israelites.* Mount St. Catherine is situated almost in the centre. To the northward, across the broad valley of the Wâdy el-Sheikh, begins the lower mountain-range of the Zebeir, with its western extremity terminating in the two peaks called el-Djoze, and its eastern descending into the open country towards Wâdy Sal. Beyond the Zebeir northwards lie numerous sandy plains and valleys,—a desolate, waterless, sterile region. At its eastern end it is called el-Birka. On the north it touches the great chain of et-Tîh, which extends in a regular line eastwards, parallel with the Zebeir. On reaching, as it strikes toward the rising sun, the lofty peak of el-Odjom, it divides into two branches; one turning off at a right angle northwards, and after continuing for about fifteen miles in that direction, again turning to the east, and stretching, parallel with the second and southern branch, right across the peninsula, towards the Gulf of Suez. The north-

* See Exodus xix. 1, 2; Numbers ix. 1, x. 12, &c.

ern branch, el-Dhelel, bounds the view from Mount St. Catherine.

Now, looking to the eastern quarter, we shall find that the mountains, beyond the elevated Sinaitic region, run in a lower range towards the Wâdy Sal, and that the slope of the upper mountains is much less abrupt than on the opposite side. From Sal, east and north-east, the chains cross one another in many irregular masses of inferior height, until they reach the Gulf of Akabah. Excepting the short area from Nuweibi to Dahab, the mountains which border this gulf are all of secondary elevation, but beyond these two points they attain to a considerable altitude.

Southward, the view from the consecrated peak is bounded by the mighty bulk of Om Shomar, which forms an isolated nucleus not immediately connected with the upper Sinai, though bordering closely upon it.

To the right of this Titan-peak may be distinguished the sea, in the neighbourhood of Tûr; near which begins a low calcareous mountain-chain called Jebel Hunam, or "Death," extending along the Gulf of Suez, and separated from the upper Sinai by the gravelly plain of el-Kâ'a. This plain terminates to the south-west of Mount St. Catherine, and nearly in the direction of Jebel Serbal. Towards the Kâ'a the central Sinai mountains are very abrupt, having no intermediate secondary chain between them and the plain at their feet. The mountain of Serbal (as we have already indicated) is divided from the Jebel

Mûsa group by several valleys, and especially by the Wâdy Hebrân.

So much we have from Burckhardt, and his statements have been confirmed by later explorers. Schimper, in his frequent ascents, chiefly studied the flora of the mountain, which is different from, and more abundant than that of the Jebel Mûsa. It chiefly consists, however, of aromatic shrubs.

From Russegger we borrow the following table of measurements, which shows the gradual ascent, in a succession of terraces, of the peninsula, from north-west to south-east:—

	Feet.
1. The plateau of Debbe.....	1507
2. Wâdy Nasseb.....	1291
3. Wâdy Chomile.....	2074
4. Wâdy Borak.....	2349
5. Wâdy Oesh.....	3500
6. The Saheb plateau, at the foot of Sinai.....	5115
7. Convent of el-Arbain.....	5464
8. Jebel Mûsa, at the cross.....	5956
9. Jebel Horeb, at the convent ruins.....	7097
10. Jebel Catherine.....	8168

The ascent has also been successfully undertaken by Dr. Robinson, who gave to the cleft through which he passed up from the Ledja the designation of Shû Mûsa, or "Cleft of Moses." He notices two rocks as marked with inscriptions of the same kind as those in the Wâdy Mukatteb. He also describes a valley called the Wâdy Tulâ, as formed by the confluence of two wâdys west of St. Catherine, one of which, Um Kûraf, runs parallel with the Ledja. This valley

skirts the western base of the northern spur of St. Catherine, and debouches into the Wâdy Rudhwâh, which, in its turn, flows into the Wâdy Selaf.

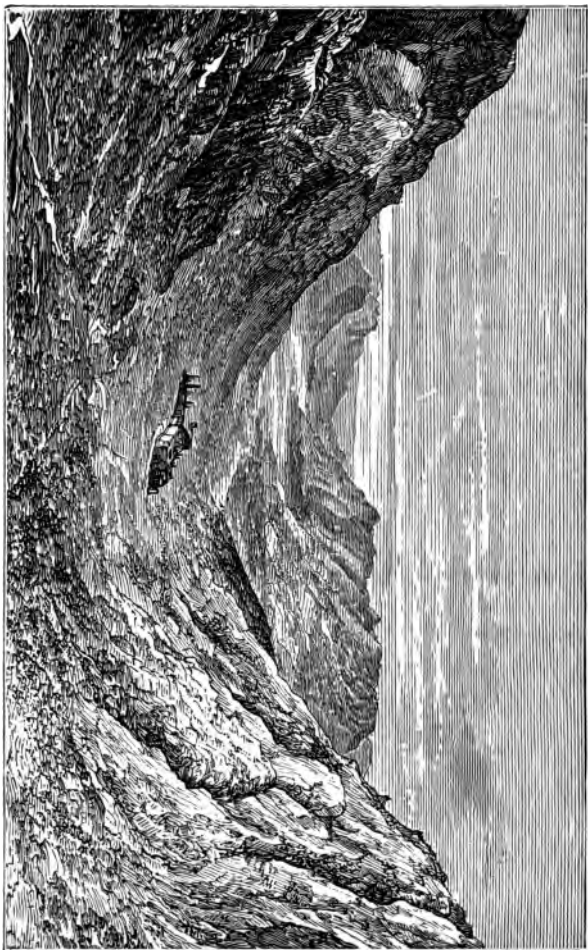
Dr. Robinson adds that the wide unbroken panoramic view from the summit of St. Catherine is far more splendid than that from Sinai, and that no traveller, who wishes to command a noble view of the whole country traversed by the Israelites in their protracted wanderings, should fail to visit it.*

Dean Stanley ascended Jebel Katerin in 1852. He describes his expedition in a very few words:—†

"The next day," he says, "we ascended the highest peak, not of the whole peninsula, but of the Sinai range. Its whole historical or legendary interest depends on the story from which it derives its name. It is a noble mountain, and glorious was the view from the top. It embraces not only the labyrinth of bare granite peaks, which you see from Jebel Mûsa, but a panorama over the whole peninsula. Once more we saw Serbal itself; once more, and now nearer at hand, the masses of Om Shomar; and (what we could not see from Serbal) both the gulfs of the Red Sea, beautifully blue, with the high mountains of Egypt and Arabia beyond. Most complete, too, was the view of Jebel Mûsa below; the reddish granite of its lower mass ending in the gray-green granite of the peak itself."

* Dr. Robinson, "Biblical Researches."

† Dean Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," p. 77.



WADY ED-DEIR AND PLAIN OF ER-RAHAM



THE CONVENT OF ST. CATHERINE.*

A digression to visit this stately pile of buildings may be permitted us, since we have had such frequent occasion to make reference to it.

The traveller who comes upon it, after his long journey in the desolation and solitude of the desert, cannot restrain a feeling of wonder and delight, as its massive walls rise upon his gaze, with the double standard of the Lamb and the Cross floating freely from its loftiest point. His wonder changes to awe as the sound of its matin or vesper music swells through the dreary valley, and his awe into surprise when he enters within its precincts, and surveys its bannered church, its long galleries of chapel and cell and guest-chamber, and its library rich in priceless manuscripts. Attached to the convent is a pleasant garden, planted with almond, orange, and pomegranate, with dark cypresses and tall bare poplars. It is surrounded by a high wall, and within its enclosure is the grotto which serves as a common sepulchre for the dried mummies of the dead members of the conventual fraternity.

The church, it is said, was built by the Emperor Justinian in A.D. 527, though the language of his contemporary Procopius would lead one to infer that the building erected by the emperor was probably raised in the mountain-cleft above, and that the present

* It is situated partly on a spur of Jebel Mûssa, and partly in the Shoeb valley.

convent was the fortress which he built at the mountain-foot, having been converted to its present use at a later period.*

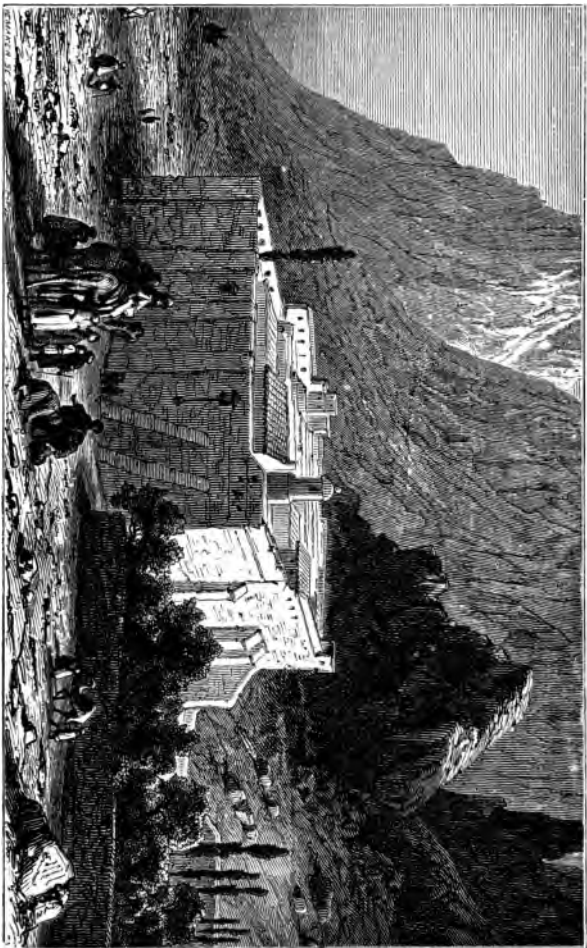
At all events, the circumstances of its foundation were very singular. The fame of the architectural magnificence of the great Byzantine emperor having reached the hermits who then fasted and prayed in the recesses of Mount Sinai, they, when they heard that he delighted to build churches and convents, made a journey to him, and complained that the wandering sons of Ishmael were wont to attack them suddenly, devour their provisions, desolate their places, enter their cells, and carry off everything, breaking also into the church, and eating even the holy "wafers." He listened to their complaint, and undertook to build a convent, wherein they might devote themselves to holy offices. Splendidly did he fulfil his promise; raising an immense structure, which was both fortress and convent; building a sumptuous church, still adorned with medallions of himself and his Empress Theodora; and founding thirty-six chapels, each devoted to the worship of a separate sect. Much of its ancient magnificence, it is true, has vanished; but it still retains enough to command the profound interest of the Christian traveller, while it exercises a superstitious influence on the imaginations of the wild Bedaween.†

The convent, like its garden, is encircled by a high

* Stewart, "The Tent and the Khan," pp. 129, 130.

† Robinson, "Biblical Researches," i. *passim*.

CONVENT OF ST. CATHERINE





wall. There is no opening at the ground, and the only door at one time was an aperture in the wall, at the elevation of about thirty feet, to which, by an apparatus of ropes, men, and cattle, and provisions, and the luggage of travellers—in truth, everything allowed to enter the convent—were lifted. *

The length of each side of the convent-area is estimated by Dr. Robinson at from two hundred to two hundred and forty-five feet; and the walls are built of pieces of rough granite, each about eighteen to twenty inches in thickness. One side had formerly fallen in, but during the French occupation of Egypt, it was restored by General Kleber. The eastward wall is in a somewhat dilapidated condition. The wall towards Horeb is of greater elevation than that next the wâdy; and the little cannon mounted on the ramparts give the place a certain appearance of security.

The interior of the building is divided into numerous small courts, connected by stairs and corridors, which also communicate with the adjacent garden through subterranean passages, the whole forming a perfect labyrinthine puzzle. The guest-chambers, small but neat, are nearly a hundred in number; and there are also galleries, and cellars, and apartments for the monks. Nor must we forget the workshops for all kinds of artisans; the bakery; or the flour-mill, turned by donkeys.

The convent is supplied with water from two deep

* Burckhardt, "Travels in Arabia," pp. 565-570.

and excellent wells ; the so-called " Well of Moses," near the church, and another, excavated, it is said, at the cost of an English nobleman in 1760. Wooden galleries surround the inner court along the several stories of the building, and the little cells of the monks open upon these. The walls and pillars are inscribed with verses from the Bible, but these are mostly written in an illegible and abbreviated Greek character. The guest-chambers are supplied with divans, carpets, pictures, and other adornments and conveniences. There is no tower, and the solitary bell in the building is rung only on Sundays ; the call to morning-prayers is made by hammering a granite block, and to vespers by repeatedly striking a log of wood.

The massive church, both on account of its beauty and its antiquity, and its valuable mosaics, calls for special notice. The choir alone dates back to the epoch of Justinian ; the remainder is of later construction. Its ground-plan is that of the old basilica ; it has three naves, and six pillars and seven arches on each side. The choir is circular at the end, where once stood a representation of the burning bush, and in the court behind it is represented another bush as springing from the same roots. This has always been regarded as a place of special sanctity. On the whole, though not without many defects, the interior is imposing from the magnificence of its ornamentation. Its splendid lamps and candlesticks of gold and silver, and its rich crucifixes and vases, are mostly the gifts



PRIOR OF THE CONVENT OF ST. CATHERINE.



of Russians ; the stranger's gaze is also arrested by numerous pictures of apostles, and saints, and maidens, and Biblical scenes.

Several chapels exist for the benefit of the various sects which in former days were wont to establish pilgrimages to Sinai, the Armenian, Syrian, Coptic, Greek, and Latin branches of the Church ; but since the decay of the old pilgrimizing spirit, these have lost their original use, and now are seldom opened.

Apart from all these interesting features is one which attracts attention by its singular inappropriateness : it is a Mohammedan mosque, remaining to this very day in the shadow of the Cross of Christ, as a sign of the old supremacy of the Turks over the Sinaitic peninsula. According to the monks, it was built in order to secure the favour of the Sultan Selim, and prevent his threatened destruction of the convent. But then Burckhardt, when exploring the manuscript treasures of the monastic library, discovered that the mosque was more ancient than the monastic legend allowed. It was in 1489 that Sultan Selim overran Egypt ; while Burckhardt found traces as early as 1381 of Moslem worship conducted in a mosque within the convent-walls. Even now Moslem pilgrims sometimes come hither to worship ; and when any illustrious person is a guest, the call to prayer is sounded from the minaret. From Wilken we learn that such occurrences took place as early as the era of the Crusades, and were regarded by the monks as terrible but inevitable calamities. In the year 1136,

Baldwin, King of Jerusalem, proposed a pilgrimage to Sinai, but was prevented by the representations of the monks, that his visit would only arouse the suspicion of the Moslems, and expose the convent to danger.

The old legend that Mohammed once made a pilgrimage to the convent as a proof of his veneration for Moses would seem to be entirely groundless.*

The number of the monks varies: there were twenty-three at the time of Burckhardt's visit, twenty at that of Dr. Robinson's, twenty-six at that of Schubert's. Among them you may find a cook, a distiller, a baker, a tailor, a carpenter, a shoemaker, a smith, a mason, and a gardener. Most of them, according to Schubert, are old men of from seventy to eighty, but in full enjoyment of all their faculties; a circumstance explained by the healthfulness of the climate, as well as by the strictness of the monastic regimen. They bake excellent bread, and distil very good date brandy, called *raki*; their fare consists of soup, vegetables, fruit, leeks, olives, and dried fish. Strangers are entertained with goats' flesh, dried fruit, and raki. Mass is read twice every day, and twice every night; the discipline of the monks being very rigid in all that concerns food, fasting, and prayer.

* The story runs:—As Mohammed rested with his camels on Mount Menejia, an eagle was seen to spread its wings over his head; and the monks, struck by this augury of his future greatness, received him into their convent; and he in return, unable to write, stamped with ink on his hand the signature to a contract of protection, drawn up on the skin of a gazelle, and deposited in the archives of the convent. The contract, however, if it ever existed, has long since disappeared.



IKONOMOS OF THE CONVENT OF ST. CATHERINE.

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They are under the general control of a Prior, whom the Arabs call the wakyl; but the Ikonomos (*Οικονόμος*), whom the Arabs designate the kolob, is the real supreme ruler of the establishment, directing all its affairs.

It is not for us, we may say with Dean Stanley,* in conclusion, to judge all the difficulties of their situation, the poverty and ignorance of the monks, the apparently unconquerable barbarism of the Arabs. Yet looking as impartially as we can at the singular advantages enjoyed by the convent, it is not easy to think of another institution with such great opportunities so signally wasted. Here is a colony of Christian pastors planted amongst heathens, who wait on them for their daily bread, and believe in their power to draw the rain from heaven, yet scarcely a spark of civilization or Christianity seems to have been imparted to a single tribe or family in that wide wilderness. Nor have the monks of Sinai, from their first foundation to the present time, contributed in any way whatsoever to the sum of human knowledge.

ASCENT OF HOREB AND SINAI.

The first traveller to ascend both peaks of Sinai was Seetzen, who left the Convent of St. Catherine on the 16th of April 1807, accompanied by his servant, one of the monks, the Arabs attached to the monastery, three Bedaween, and two boys to carry provi-

* Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," pp. 55, 56.

sions. All were provided with alpen-stocks, for the rocks immediately behind the convent are very steep. After half an hour's difficult climbing the little spring is reached, whose waters fill a basin at the monastery below. Thence he ascended to the eminence crowned by the Chapel of the Holy Virgin; and soon afterwards, through a narrow rocky gorge, arrived at a gate, partly hewn out of the solid stone, partly built up by masonry. Five minutes later, and lo! he was confronted by a second gate, beyond and above which extends a small terrace or plateau, surrounded by lofty masses of rock. Here, in this almost aerial situation, the mountain-climbers found a crystal spring, clearer than that glassy fount of which Horace speaks, and shaded by a dark-green cypress-tree. Some low shrubs flourished in the vicinity, and moss and herbage grew over the ruins of a chapel called by the name of Elijah.

The side which they had ascended, named Chorif—that is, Horeb—by the guide, was remarkably steep, with occasional passages that were really precipitous. Seetzen thinks it would have been inaccessible* if a path had not been constructed up to the fountain-terrace, partly by laying down boulders at convenient points, and partly by hewing steps in the hard red granite.

Burckhardt, when, a few years later, he followed in the footsteps of Seetzen, found the rocks in the neighbourhood of the crystal spring covered with

* Ritter, "Comparative Geography," pp. 205, 206.

numerous Arabic inscriptions, some of which are three and four hundred years old. He states that both the Koran and Moslem tradition confirm the popular opinion that this peak of the Sinai mass is Horeb, the place where the Law was given.

It was Dr. Robinson who explained that the so-called plateau or terrace of Burckhardt is in reality a gentle slope along the ridge of the mountain; linking together the northern and southern summits, and that from this slope a steep path leads down to el-Arbain in the Ledja. He also found that the little spring was regularly laid with stones, and of considerable depth. The cypress measured eight feet and a half in girth at the height of four feet from the ground. The spot where it is found is situated at an elevation of 1400 feet above the convent, and 6162 feet above the sea.

Despite the various applications, says Ritter, which have been made of the word *Horeb* to the three peaks now known as Sinai, St. Catherine, and Horeb respectively, we prefer to adopt the old legend, which places it near the Chapel of Elijah, and near to that cleft or cavern in the rock where the prophet found an asylum. We read in 1 Kings xix. 8, 9, that he came to Horeb and lodged all night in a cave, and we can find no ground for disputing the accuracy of the tradition which has found a site for that cave. And sublime as is the scene, and sublime as are the natural conditions surrounding it, the words of the Biblical narrative are fully worthy of them:—

“And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?”

This, then, is the Horeb of Christian pilgrims, with its awful memories of the tempest and the earthquake; to the south rises Sinai, with its not less awful memories of the terrible signs which accompanied the giving of the Law.*

The more elevated portion of the peak called Horeb is situated farther to the north, encircled by sharp craggy pinnacles, like the minarets of a Turkish mosque, which rise several hundred feet higher, particularly on the west side, and above the Ledja gorge. The descent from the ridge between these rocky spires into the er-Râhah plain is about five hundred feet. The said ridge is known to the Arabs by the name of Râs es Süfsâfeh, and was first explored by Dr. Robinson. The great American traveller found himself unable to reconcile the features of the northern extremity of the mountain—what we now call Sinai

* The word “Horeb” seems literally to signify the “Mountain of the dried-up ground.”

—with the description given in the Mosaic narrative; and for the purpose of gaining more satisfactory data he ascended, with considerable difficulty, this northern portion, examining first the western, and then the eastern side. He was not satisfied with the view from the former; but when, after great toil, he had surmounted the lofty columns and crags and minarets which rise, in labyrinthic confusion, on the north side of Râs es Süfsâfeh, the prospect before him filled him with awe and admiration. The grand sweep of the er-Râhah plain, the mouths of every valley or wâdy, and especially of that of el-Sheikh, were all clearly discernible; and he was at once convinced that this, and this only, was the place where the Lord descended in fire, and smoke, and earthquake, and with the voice of a trumpet, and all the people trembled.

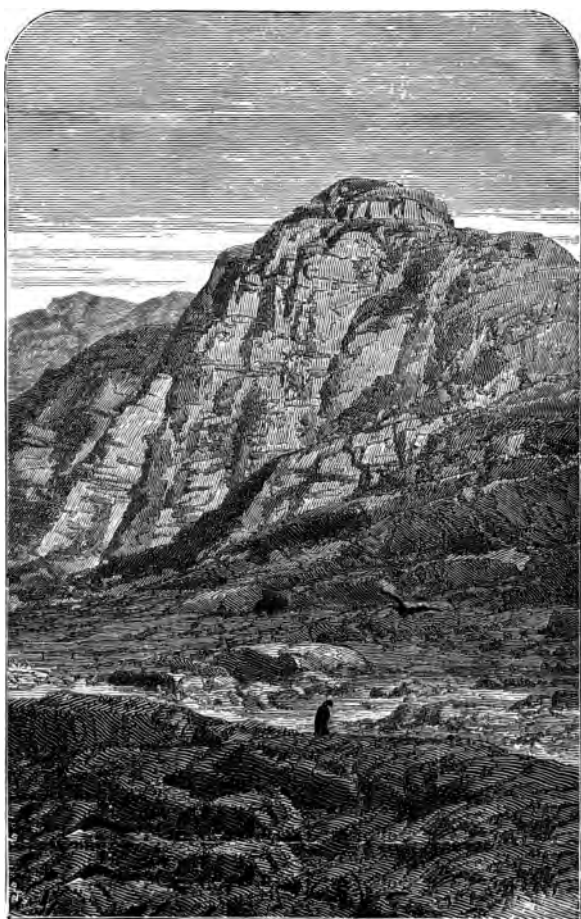
It will be remembered that only the northern precipitous acclivity, where it would have been possible for the people on the plain to come and touch the very face of the mountain, was held sacred from the hands of the Israelites on pain of death. Now, from the wide plain of er-Râhah every incident in the sublime drama of the Deliverance of the Law could be clearly seen, and yet Sinai, the southern peak, would be kept from the eye of the profane, inasmuch as it is completely hidden by the northern rocks of the mountain.

We shall now proceed to trace the various routes to Mount Sinai. First, it must be understood by the

reader that Sinai is accessible only from the back of the mountain, sloping northward; that is, by way of the little plateau which supports the Ohapel of Elijah; for its southern slope is a succession of precipices. From the north the summit is invisible until Horeb is reached; and at the convent you can see neither the peaks of Sinai nor of St. Catherine. The height of the mountain is variously estimated, but most English authorities place it at about 7500 feet.

Near the chapels of Elijah and Eliaha, and at a curious fissure in the weather-worn rock which the superstitious reverence of the Arabs declares to be the footprint of Mohammed's camel, the traveller finds a rough staircase of unhewn stones; and passing these, he gains, at length, the summit of Jebel Mŭsa, a single rock of granite, measuring, according to Dr. Robinson, eighty feet in diameter. Here, side by side, and built out of a common veneration for the great event on which both creeds are founded, stand the ruins of a small Christian church—once divided amongst all the Christian sects—and of a small Mohammedan mosque. From whatever point the traveller sees this famous peak, these two "fragments of worship," nearly always visible upon it, more distinctly than anything else indicate what it is.

Not far from the mosque, but somewhat lower down, lies a small grotto, which Burckhardt describes as a basin cut in the solid rock to receive rain-water. In this, however, he is mistaken, unless he refers to a tank situated between the two ruins, noticed both



MOUNT SINAI.

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by Wellsted and Ruppell. The rocks around the grotto are covered with the names of pilgrims in Greek, Arabic, Syriac, and even Armenian characters.

The Arabs believe that the tables of stone on which the Law was written are concealed beneath the floor of the little chapel on the summit of Mount Sinai, and they have made repeated efforts to disinter them. Another of their superstitions is, that the rain which falls throughout the peninsula falls at the will and under the control of Moses. It is their conviction, also, that the monks of St. Catherine have possession of the mystic book *Tasurat*, which was sent from heaven to Moses, and that rain falls or sunshine comes just as that book is open or closed. They indicate a rough depression in one of the loftiest crags which surmount the summit of Sinai as the mark of the foot of Moses when he turned away from the Divine Presence in an emotion of fear. "Near the chapel," says a traveller, "and in the place where the glory of God appeared to Moses, there is a hole in the hard rock, by looking into which you can see the likeness of the prophet just as clearly as if you were looking into a looking-glass! In this cavity he stood, and God covered it with his right hand while He was passing by."

Again: the Arabs have a legend that on the spot where now stands the ruined mosque, Mohammed fasted forty days. On the top of the mountain they profess to trace the footsteps of their prophet, and

each Bedaween reverently kneels and kisses the hallowed spot.

The so-called Chapel of Moses, on the eastern side of the summit, appears to have been erected with the materials of an older and larger church or monastery. Fragments of hewn marble and granite are scattered about the vicinity.

Towards the east, south, and west, the view from Sinai is bounded by the interposing masses of loftier mountains; yet it is not deficient in features of interest. Wellsted says: "Close before me rose St. Catherine, with its bare, wedge-shaped peak.....For many years, in the course of repeated voyages made in all the waters adjacent to this region, I had been accustomed to look at all these mountain systems from every point of view, but the loftiness of the Sinai group gave it at once a special character. Rising in sharp, isolated wedges, enormous masses of rock have detached themselves from time to time, and have fallen, giving rise to deep clefts, gorges, and ravines, which break through the whole district, and give it the wildest aspect. The highest summits are covered with snow in the winter, which, melting in spring, fills the channels of countless brooks, and sweeps with mad and devastating violence through all the mountain-passes, carrying away whatever little soil may have accumulated. The lofty wedge shape brings the peaks of the Sinai group in sharp contrast with those of the other long low ridges of the peninsula. No resting-places for man, no villages, no castles,

give animation to the scene, as in European mountain regions; no lake, no clear river, no waterfall, no forest, breaks the monotony of solitude. Everywhere there is seen only the wide, empty wilderness—gray, dark-brown, black; in the extreme distance, the bright sea of sand. There is nothing to give an interest to the scene except the mighty recollection of the Past; this throws over it all a dark, and deep, and mysterious charm.”

Von Schubert, the German traveller, tells us that the view over the broad tract to the north, and the jagged rim of the panorama, which the deep blue Arabian sky brings out all the more sharply and distinctly, give the scene a peculiar character. Southward and eastward the eye catches glimpses of the sea which bounds the peninsula on two of its sides, and far away in the distance it traces the fair outline of the Arabian and Egyptian coasts. Between them lies neither green meadow nor tilled field, neither brook, forest, village, nor Alpine hut. Only the roar of the storm and the peal of the thunder are heard in the wild wastes of Sinai; all else is silent, and the whole scene remains, one would say, as it was left on the third day of creation, when no green thing lived upon the Earth. Where can there be a better place, asks Schubert, to explore the difficult questions of geological science than this, which apparently has never undergone any change, either from vegetable growth or from the deposit of later formations?

And, he adds, in such a place as this was the Law

given; the Law that leads to Christ, Who is the fulfilment of the Law.

Before we take leave of Sinai and its associations, scriptural and legendary, it will be fitting that we should say a few words in reference to the most famous of all the Sinaitic memorials, the Rock of Moses.

Every traveller, from Burckhardt downwards, has described the isolated mass of granite, from ten to fifteen feet in height, which stands in the dark wild ravine of the Ledja (or Lejá), just underneath the ridge of the Rás Süfsâfeh:—"Slightly leaning forwards, a rude seam or scoop running over each side, intersected by wide slits or cracks, which might, by **omitting or including those of less distinctness, be enlarged or diminished to any number between ten and twenty**; perhaps ten on each side would be the most correct account; and the stone between each of these cracks worn away as if by the dropping of water from the crack immediately above." Between this detached block, or boulder, and the image which is generally formed of the "Rock in Horeb," there is no resemblance. Its position, moreover, does not correspond to any rational theory of the event it is supposed to commemorate; and yet it was not unnatural that uncultivated minds, more eager for minute coincidences than for general accuracy of detail, should fix upon it as the Smitten Rock. Accordingly, there is good reason to believe that it is the most ancient legendary locality in the district.

It would seem to have been known to Josephus. At all events, reference to it is made in the Koran more than once as "the rock with the twelve mouths," for the twelve tribes of Israel, the said mouths being the cracks or fissures in the stone to which we have already alluded. It is regarded to this day by the Bedaween with peculiar reverence, and from the mediæval times has always been an object of interest to Christian pilgrims. But we must take leave to say that the stone is not the Mosaic rock—not the rock in Horeb—but simply a "trick of nature," such as we meet with in mountain regions frequently. Taking it for what it is, however—an object invested with associations of the highest interest—it cannot but arrest the attention of every traveller.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GROUP OF MOUNT SERBAL.



ONE of the most recent ascents of Mount Serbal was made by Dean Stanley in 1852. From the plain of Murkhâh he entered the Wâdy Shellâl, or "Valley of Cataracts;" plunging into the bosom of mountains of singular form and remarkable colour. A rocky staircase—created by Moses, say the Arabs, to enable the Israelites to get out of the valley—the Nâkb Badera, led into another but more beautiful valley, that of Sidri, which is shut in between red granite mountains descending like precipices upon the sands. It was a sight worthy of all remembrance to see, at early dawn, the sunbeams striking the various-coloured heights; and the imagination is roused to a conception of the great effect this spectacle must have had upon the Israelite camp, as it broke up into the shout, "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee." In the midst of the Wâdy Sidri, where the granite gives place to sandstone, the first inscriptions are seen. A few more followed up the course of a late-

ral valley, which our travellers explored for the sake of seeing Egyptian hieroglyphics and figures carved in the cliffs,—strange sight for the Israelites, if they passed that way. A still larger number of inscriptions, however, occur in the Wâdy Mukatteb, which we have already described, and out of which the travellers pass into the endless windings of the Wâdy Feirân.

These wâdys, we should explain, are exactly like rivers, except in having no water; and it is this appearance of torrent-bed and banks, and clefts in the rock for tributary streams, and at times even rushes and shrubs fringing their course, which renders the wilderness so dry, and, as it were, athirst to the eye,—

“Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink.”

A curious spectacle, too, is presented by the mountains, which are streaked from summit to base as if with boiling streams of dark red matter poured over them. The road, too, lies through what seem to be the ruins, the cinders, of mountains calcined to ashes, like the heaps of a gigantic foundry.

Dean Stanley remarks that he cannot conceive of a more interesting country for geological study. Even to the most uneducated eye the colours tell their own story, of chalk, and limestone, and sandstone, and granite; and the signs all around and about you are such as to give the impression that you are travelling in “the very focus of Creative Power.”

Having encamped for the night at el-Hesna, in the shadow of tamarisks and palma, the travellers resumed their journey at half-past five on the following morning.

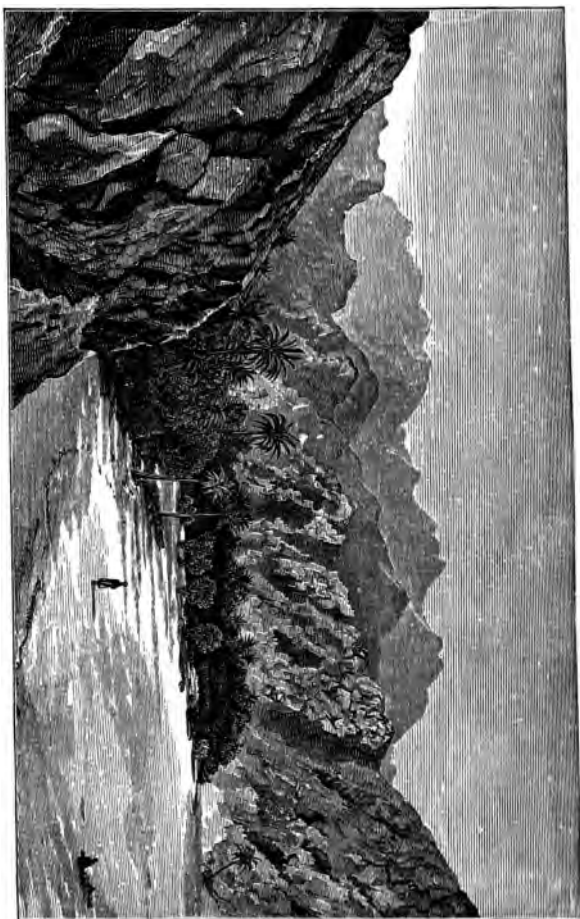
They passed the ruins of the old Christian city and episcopal palace of Paran, lying under the hill supposed to be that on which Moses prayed during the eddies of the great battle of Rephidim; and then turned up the long gully occupied in part by the brook of Wâdy 'Aleyat, which led them to its ferny source at the base of the mountain.

Serbal is colossal in dimensions and magnificent in form. It may be characterized as a vast mass of peaks, which, from most points of view, may be reduced to five, the number adopted by the Bedaween. These five granitic peaks rise so precipitously, so column-like, from the broken ground which forms the root of the mountain, as at first sight to appear inaccessible. But they are divided by steep ravines, filled with fragments of fallen granite.

The traveller wends his way up the central valley, the Wâdy Abû-Hamad, or "Valley of the Father of Wild Figs," which is laborious but not difficult, and leads, after a three hours' journey, up to a ridge between the third and fourth peak. Here, by a pool of water surrounded by an old enclosure, he may rest a while.

Three quarters of an hour more, and over smooth blocks of granite, he reaches the top of the third or central peak, which consists of two eminences. The

JEBEL SERBAL FROM WADY FEIRAN.





higher is one huge block of granite; on which, as on the back of some petrified tortoise, you stand and overlook the whole peninsula of Sinai. The Red Sea, with the hills of Egypt opposite; the wide waste of el-Ká'a on the south, the village and grove of Tor appearing as a dark line on the shore; on the east, the vast cluster of Horeb and Sinai, with the peaks of St. Catherine; and, high above all these, the monarch of the Sinaitic mountains, the least famous but the most splendid, the long unknown and unvisited Om Shomar. You may distinguish every feature of the extraordinary conformation: the wádys as they course and meander in all directions; the long curve of the Wády es-Sheikh; the infinite number of peaks, pinnacles, spires, and minarets; the dark granite here, the brown sandstone there, the yellow wilderness of the desert, the verdant oases of the Wády Feirán, and the refreshing brightness of the palm-grove of Rephidim.

On the northern and somewhat lower eminence are visible the remains of a building of uncertain date. It is built of fragments of granite, cemented with lime or mortar. In the centre is a rough hole, and close beside it, on the granite rocks, may be traced three of those mysterious inscriptions, which, whatever they mean elsewhere, must mean here that this summit was frequented by unknown pilgrims, to whom these characters were familiar from daily use. A point of rock immediately below this ruin forms the extreme edge of the peak. On each side it is

flanked by the tremendous precipices of the two neighbouring peaks,—itself as precipitous; and as you see them overlooking the vast circle of desert,—plain, hill, and valley,—you cannot but feel that no scene was better fitted for the giving of the Law to Israel and the elder world.*

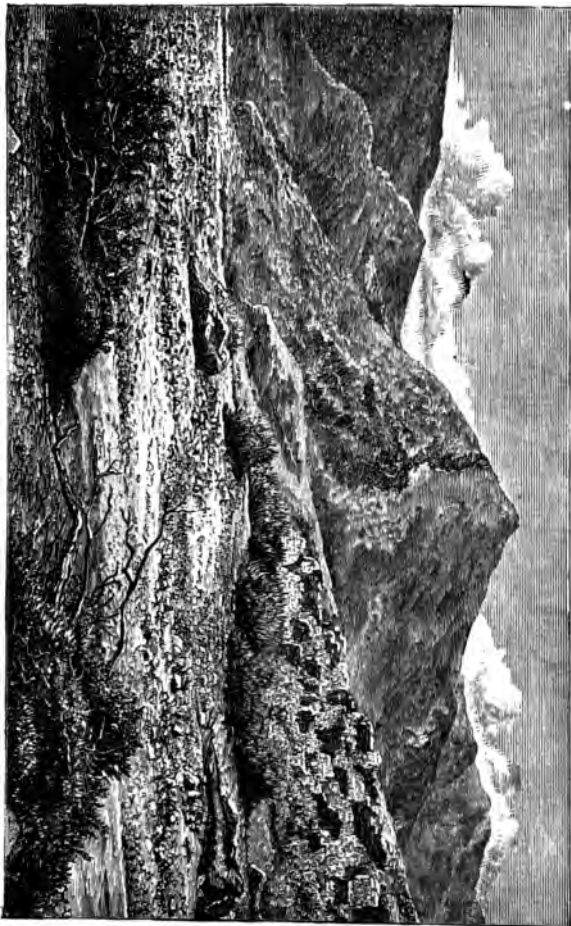
We may now give a brief description of the ascent of Mount Serbal by Dr. Stewart in 1854:—†

He began his expedition in the Wâdy Feirân, which he describes as a narrow, winding valley. He had made but one turn in it, he says, before he came upon the first of the gardens for which the valley is famous. It contained, within a rude enclosure, a hut used as a storehouse for drying dates, and a considerable number of palm and nubk trees. A few yards from the gate there was a deep draw-well; and here two Arab girls were standing, in charge of a large flock of goats that cropped the scanty herbage of the wâdy. These were the first Bedaween women our traveller had seen without the *yashmak*;‡ but, in addition to the ordinary blue garment, they wore, like the peasant women of Egypt, a shawl or veil of the same material, fastened on the crown of the head, and hanging down the back, which, on the approach of the strangers, they made do duty for it by pulling

* Dean Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine," pp. 70-73. See also Dr. Robinson, "Biblical Researches," pp. 110, *et seq.*

† Stewart, "The Tent and the Khan," pp. 109, 110, *et seq.*

‡ A kind of shawl, in which the Arab women hide the lower part of the face.



WADY FEIRAN (SEPHIDIM)



it round one side of the face, and holding it with their teeth. One of them wore a bracelet of large-sized amber beads on her arm; and their back hair was brought round to their foreheads, and twisted into the shape of a horn, which protruded beyond the head-gear.

At 10 A.M. the travellers reached a remarkable rocky promontory running into the wâdy on the right, at the point where the Wâdy 'Aleyat joins it. This is called Hagar Mahgrug, and upon its summit stand the ruins of a convent or castle. All around were scattered the remains of houses, and at no great distance lay an ancient graveyard of considerable area. On the mountain-side, to the left hand, were also the ruins of a church and other buildings, probably conventual. This was Feirân (Paran), a town of much importance in the fifth and following centuries of our era; being the seat of a bishop and the abode of a considerable Christian population, when Serbal was still supposed to be the "Mount of God." The ancient castellated building on Hagar Mahgrug, commanding Wâdy Feirân to the east and west, as well as the Wâdy 'Aleyat, was probably both the citadel and the episcopal palace. It is built to the height of ten feet from the ground, with rough boulder stones from the valley, while the superstructure is formed of mud dried and hardened in the sun.

From Wâdy Feirân Dr. Stewart turned to the right into the Wâdy 'Aleyat, which strikes straight

to the base of Mount Serbal. Accompanied by an old Bedaween guide and a young gillie, he now proceeded at the rapid pace of five miles an hour; but the roughness of the path and the heat of the sun made this rate unendurable, and Dr. Stewart was glad when, in little more than an hour, the party entered the ravine which separates the easternmost part of Serbal from the rest of the mountain. A bend to the south-west at the entrance completely shuts it in from Wâdy Feirân, a ridge of hills striking between them. The avalanches of rock and stone which, during the course of ages, have been brought down from the mountains by the winter-torrents, have so overspread the valley as to suggest the idea that the clouds, at some period or other, must have

rained down boulders instead of hail-stones; yet it is not wanting in such verdure as the desert produces, and its barrenness is not infrequently relieved by clusters of sont trees. These acacias are the shittah trees of Scripture; and the ark of the covenant, the cherubim, and the pillars of the tabernacle were made from their wood. It is worthy of notice that while they are found in the wâdy in still considerable numbers, not one is to be seen in the plain of er-Râhah, or in any of the wâdys around Jebel Mûsa.

Dr. Stewart saw some ruins on the opposite side of the dry water-course; and near them a few black tents, whose girlish tenants were scattered among the rocks watching their flocks, and singing "as if they would never grow old."

On boulders of sandstone or porphyry he observed, at intervals along his course, short inscriptions written in the same characters as those of Wâdy Mukatteb.

On a near approach to its colossal mass, you are not disappointed by Serbal. It realizes your dreams; it does not fail your expectations. Majestic as is its aspect when, in the distance, you see its crest towering above all its compeers, still more noble is its presence when viewed from Wâdy 'Alcyat. There are no outworks or buttresses, no shoulders or projecting spurs, to detract from its stature or conceal its summit, until you have achieved half the ascent; its precipitous sides rise sheer and abrupt from the valley, like rocks from the sea.

Some authority has happily described Serbal as a "series of inverted stalactites." Between each peak, as Dr. Stewart remarks, intervenes a glen or defile, so steep and narrow as to seem impracticable, but most of them can be ascended by the determined traveller.

Our traveller asserts that his experience in mountain-climbing had been considerable, but that he had never met with task so difficult as the ascent of Serbal. There was no beaten path. Sometimes he and his companions struck for a few minutes on a gazelle's track, but, for the most part, they wandered where the guide's eye judged the passage to be most practicable. Several times they came to a halt before some great mass of rock which projected across the ravine directly in their way, and round which it was

impossible to creep. No resource, then, but to take its rough side as best they could, with the unpleasant certainty that a false step or slip of the foot would dash them headlong down the steep. They took hours and a half to reach the top of the ravine, where the actual division of the peaks takes place; but were frequently obliged, by the great rarefaction of the air, to lie down for five minutes at a time to recover their breath.

The cleft between the peaks of the mountain runs straight right through from north-east to south-west, and contains quantities of wild sage and a considerable supply of water. After emerging from it, the travellers began to ascend the easternmost peak, and endured another hour of very dangerous climbing, as their path lay over the steep, bare, and slippery surface of granite rock, where not a stone or a clod could be found to steady the foot. The only plan the travellers could adopt was to lie down flat on their backs, and with arms and feet to hoist the body upwards; but if, after such a hoist, they failed to find a crevice or projecting corner as a rest for foot or hand, they glided back with alarming velocity to the ground they had conquered with so much difficulty. It was like the ascent of a glacier,—a glacier of granite, instead of ice.

This last ascent was made on the northern side of the peak; and in the ravines sheltered from the sun's rays they met with thick ice, which afforded them

very grateful refreshment. About a quarter of an hour from the summit they reached the staircase already described, consisting of blocks of granite laid one above another upon the surface of the smooth, slippery rock, for the behoof of the pilgrims who once frequented this mountain as a holy place. Though there are wide gaps in it now, it proved of great assistance to Stewart and his companions. At the place where they struck into it they obtained their first view of the Gulf of Suez, with the range of mountains called *Jebel Zeit*, on the African shore. As they drew near the one huge block of granite which forms the summit, the Sinaitic inscriptions again began to appear; and the block itself, with others lying contiguous to it, were covered with them, though many are now illegible. Owing to the manner in which these rocks are piled together, one or two grottoes are formed, quite capable of affording people shelter. On the narrow plateau at the top a circle of loose stones is found, which Burckhardt accurately describes as about two feet high and twelve paces in diameter. These may possibly have formed a Druidical ring connected with the worship of Baal, whose name the mountain bears.

The prospect from the "topmost tower" of Serbal is of vast extent and surpassing grandeur. The first impression made on the mind, according to Dr. Stewart, when all the wide waste of wilderness unfolds before us, is one of stupefaction. So boundless seems the view that we feel as if we should never be able to

master all its details; but gradually wādys and mountains begin to link together in the memory, until we discover that almost the entire Sinaitic peninsula is mapped out before us. The more southerly or Jebel Músa group interrupts our view of the eastern gulf, or we should comprehend it in a glance, from the head of the Gulf of Suez to the head of the Gulf of Akabah. But it may be convenient to the reader if we particularize the principal features of this magnificent view.

First, then, let us look to the north. There, bounding the horizon, towers the chalky range of Jebel et-Tih, stretching across the peninsula like a glittering rampart, and remarkable for its variety of colour and stratification. Below it expands a wide sandy plain, running in the same direction, from west to east, called Wâdy er-Ramlieh, or the "Sandy Valley," towards the eastern extremity of which is situated the Ain el-Hadrah, or *Hazeroth* of Holy Writ; while, at its western extremity, where the Wâdy Humor flows into it, rise two hills, called Serbout el-Ghamel and Serabet el-Khadem, the latter crowned by many memorials of antiquity. In the same direction, but narrower, and closer at hand, the Wâdy es-Sheikh, a continuation of Wâdy Feirân, runs up to the Convent of St. Catherine; and a broad wâdy, called Berah, striking from north-west to south-east, apparently connects it with the Wâdy er-Ramlieh.

Now let us set our faces towards the rising sun.

Here, with the exception of the Wâdy Rim, which trends away east from the base of Serbal, and an occasional glimpse of the Wâdy es-Sheikh, the scene before us consists of wild, bleak mountains, piled together in labyrinthine confusion. All that is clear to the eye is that they may somehow or other be classed into three several ranges, though these occasionally run into one another; namely, one to the north, another to the south, and a third central. The northernmost of these groups is Jebel Sahl, which rises from the western shore of the Gulf of Akabah, and shuts out the view of the head of the gulf, and of the town and fortress to which it owes its name. The names of the more southern are, Jebel Walerah, and, beyond it, the Sinaitic range—the latter two groups being blended one with another in a perfect maze of bold and rugged peaks.

To the south we can discern a portion of the Red Sea, the mountains of Jebel Gharib and Jebel es-Zeit, on the African coast, and, intervening between Serbal and the sea, the long littoral plain of el-Kâ'a. This plain is, in its turn, separated from the waters by a chain of low hills, the easternmost of which are known as the Jebel Hammam,* from the so-called "Baths of Moses" in the immediate vicinity of Tûr. Far down towards the south-east rises the curious pyramid of Jebel Nakûs, or the "Mountain of the Bell;" and in a wâdy running down from the mountain to the plain of el-Kâ'a is situated, though not visible from

* Or, Hammâm Mûsa.

our present view-point, the ruined convent of Dair Sigillyeh.

To the west, the continuous view of the Red Sea is broken up by the other peaks of this mountain ; but glimpses of it are obtained both above and below the Jebel Hammam Faraoun, as well as of the Nukb el Budrah, and the wâdys Murkhâh, Mukatteb, Natel, and Feirân.

Such are the chief features in the beautiful panorama opened up to the adventurous traveller who climbs to the lofty summit of Serbal.*

* A curious derivation for the word *Serbal* is given by Ritter. He connects it with the Hindu *Siva*, which in Sanskrit is often called *Çarava*, *Çarava*, from *çara*, an arrow. *Çarvar*, he says, is the masculine form, and the *r* being readily changed to *l*, we have the root, and almost the word *Serbal*. This name, *Çarval* or *Serbal*, is the name of a god, who was conceived of as incarnate, and received homage as a mountain, and whose seat was proclaimed to be the majestic peak in the south that bears his name up to the present day.—RITTER, *Comparative Geography of Sinai and Palestine*, i., pp. 316, 317.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DESERT OF JEBEL TIH, OR OF ARABIA PETRÆA.

THE Sinaitic Peninsula proper we have looked upon as confined to the remarkable mountain-region lying between the Gulfs of Akabah and Suez. But beyond it, to the north, extends a wide and desolate table-land, which may be regarded as the more strictly continental part of Arabia Petræa.

This table-land serves as a link between the mountain masses of the south and the Mediterranean region of Egypt, Syria, and Judea. It extends from the Gulf of Akabah to the Dead Sea, and is now known as the Desert et-Tih.

Under that general term, says Ritter, are summed up all its varied physical forms,—its mountains, and valleys, and plains. Of these we have no more detailed accounts than we owe to the rapid excursions of travellers, who have found little inducement to linger in a region so barren that it is almost abandoned even by the wild Arabs, and has no place adapted for permanent and prosperous settlements. Its significance and importance are due to the simple fact, that it has

served both as a barrier and a bond between the inhabitants of Palestine and Syria, on the one hand, and the people of Egypt, Edom, Midian, with the Nabathæans and Arabs, on the other. But desolate and sterile as it is, this very characteristic has rendered it a land of as great historical influence as many a fairer and more fertile region has been.

In all its extent there is but a single locality to arrest our attention by existing monuments of human power and skill; namely, Petra in Wády Músa, the city which has given its name to the whole region.

The Desert is inhabited, in the main, by two distinct tribes of Arabs; the Et-Tur, or Southern, and the El-Sham, or Northern.

The *Beni et-Túr*, the sons of et-Túr or Tór, that is, the central mountain-land of the peninsula, are the inhabitants of the Sinai district proper, south of the Tih range, and are known under the various names of Turoniani, Towara, and Táwarah, the singular being Túry. These all seem to be one great class, subdivided again into various tribes, of which the five principal are—1. Szowaleha; 2. Aleygat; 3. El-Mezeine; 4. Ulad Soleiman; and, 5, Beni Wassel.

The *Beni el-Sham* inhabit the northern portion of the country, extending northward from the Tih ranges as far as Sham (Syria). They have no generic or class name as the Towara have, yet among them we find the Tihahoh,—that is, the dwellers on the Tih mountains and plateau. The principal tribes are:—



YOUNG CAMEL-DRIVER OF BINAL

11

1. Tiyaha, Tiyáhah, Bteiha, or Tyar ; 2. Terabim, or Terabin ; 3. Haiwât ; 4. Azazimeh ; 5. Saidin, or Saidiyeh ; and, 6, Jehâbin.

In their character and customs all these tribes closely resemble one another, and the following general remarks will apply to each with scarcely any modification.

And, first, as to their costume : the dress of the men generally consists of a ragged woollen shirt, striped brown and white, with white sleeves ; a leather girdle around the waist, into which is thrust a broad, crooked knife, about two feet long. A few parti-coloured rags, fastened together with woollen yarn, are twisted round the head, the name *kesiyeh* being given to this fantastic head-gear. The sheikhs often wear shawls upon the head. A belt of leather thrown across the shoulder contains the pouch for tinder, cartridges, and a small quantity of gunpowder. The matchlock hangs to the back. The feet are shod with sandals, never with shoes.

The females attire themselves in a black woollen chemise, with a cotton cloth upon the head, which they can let down at the approach of strangers, so as to cover them from head to foot, leaving only their eyes exposed. Sometimes, by way of ornament, they twist bits of mother-of-pearl into their hair, and wear a huge copper ring in the nose ; their hands they decorate with rings of horn or glass.

Their principal occupation is providing food,—for they are the real “bread-winners” of the household,

—baking bread on red-hot stones or plates of sheet-iron, taking care of the cattle and the milk, and spinning and weaving the few articles they require from wool and goats' hair, neither of which do they wash before using it. To the usual maternal duty of attending upon their children they pay no heed. Their chief recreations are music and dancing; and while enjoying themselves in these pastimes they use the tambourine, the rabaki (a simple kind of viol), reed fifes, and castanets. Their singing is melancholy and monotonous.

The Bedaween are as persistent as the Corsicans in keeping up the vendetta; they never swerve from the determination to avenge themselves for any offence which can be expiated only by blood; the guilty party may emigrate, but a composition or a reconciliation is very rare among them.

With all their predatory habits towards strangers who are not their guests, the poorest Bedaween are very seldom guilty of theft. Cases have been known of the Towara putting their own sons to death, when detected in any act of dishonesty. One traveller tells us that he saw a rock in the Wâdy Taiyibe, from the summit of which a Towara hurled his son, bound hand and foot, for stealing some corn from a neighbour's stores.

The Bedaween regards with more severity than the European any breach of the marriage-vow; the punishment of adultery is death. But it is a striking testimony to their purity of character



GROUP OF BEDAWEEN.

that this terrible penalty has very seldom to be inflicted.

It would seem that they are Moslems only in name ; that, at all events, they are very lax in observing the laws and rules of the Koran. The few usages which they *do* retain serve as a bond of union among the different tribes, but cannot properly be honoured with the name of "religion." They certainly pay an outward homage to the names of Moses and Mohammed ; but so careless are they in regard to the precepts of their prophet, that one of the most trustworthy travellers asserts that he never heard them repeat any of the prayers with which pious Moslems are supposed to be familiar, nor practise any ablutions. For their neglect of the latter, want of water might be pleaded as an excuse ; but then Islamism allows the use of sand, and of this material there is assuredly no lack ! Another authority tells us that the only religious observance he could detect among them was the use of the words *Bis Millah*,—that is, "In the name of God." Many of them have never attempted to commit to memory even a single prayer. The only general sign of their adherence to Islamism is the Fast of Ramadan ; but it would appear that not all the Bedaween tribes are mindful of *this* solemn season. It would be easy for them to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, the cynosure of every devout Moslem ; but they never undertake it. Sometimes, in fulfilment of a vow, or at the commencement of an expedition, they offer a sheep or a goat ; and on such occasions they

make, it is said, the sign of the cross, in blood, on the neck of the creature or on their own bodies.

It is much to be deplored that their vocabulary is so abundant in profane expressions. Literally, their mouths are full of curses; and, in this particular, they equal, if they do not surpass, the English "navvy" or the social outcasts of our great cities.

Yet, with all this blasphemy, the Arab regards his vow as sacredly inviolate; as to be fulfilled at all hazards, and to the very letter. He descends to no equivocations; he satisfies himself with no shams or pretences. Sir F. Henniker, who was present when an Arab took a solemn oath, thus describes the ceremony. The oldest man present drew his sword, placed salt on the blade, and put a morsel into his mouth, saying to his English guest, "Do likewise." According to Bedaween usage, this eating of salt together, and this display of the drawn sword, made them as blood relations. The Arab then said, "Son of my uncle, thy head is upon my shoulders." Thenceforth he would have stood by his "brother" to the very death, ay, would have given his life to save him.

Sometimes they swear by the beard of the Prophet or by the honour of their wives. Burckhardt tells us that he once received the most solemn oath which a Bedaween can give,—his most sacred pledge. The sheikh placed one hand on his son's head, and the other on the forefeet of his horse, and then swore faithful service. An oath thus given is irrevocable.



ROBBERS IN THE SINAITIC DESERT.



This loyal regard to their plighted word is an admirable and valuable element in the character of the Arabs.

That lust of plunder which is popularly ascribed to the Arab would seem to have been greatly exaggerated, or, at least, too much generalized. That he has not a "predatory instinct," however, we cannot affirm; but the vice, so far as it exists, is a special result of their position, and, we must own, of the very cosmopolitan views they hold of the "rights of man;" rights which they summarize much in the same manner as Wordsworth's *Rob Roy* :—

"The creatures see of flood and field,
And those that travel on the wind!
With them no strife can last, they live
In peace, and peace of mind.

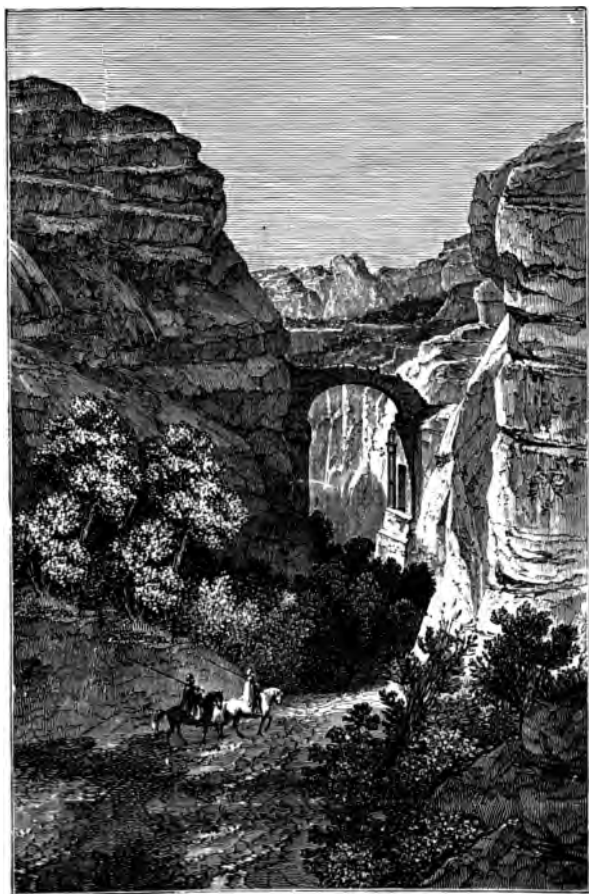
"For why?—because the good old rule
Sufficeth them, the simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can."

Nor must we forget the spirit of hostility which even the most indifferent Moslem cherishes against the infidel; that is, against all who do not accept the laws of the Prophet. "The sword," says Mohammed, "is the key of heaven and of hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of God, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months of fasting or of prayer: whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven: at the day of judgment his wounds shall be resplendent as vermilion and odoriferous as musk; and the loss of his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cheru-

bim." Such words were well calculated to develop in the Arab the predatory instinct with which he is credited.

So little has the character of the Arab changed in upwards of a century and a half, that Gibbon's elaborate description is as true now as when it was first written.

"In private life," he says, "every man, at least every family, is the judge and avenger of his own cause. The nice sensibility of honour, which weighs the insult rather than the injury, sheds its deadly venom on the quarrels of the Arabs; the honour of their women, and their *beards*, is most easily wounded; an indecent action, a contemptuous word, can be expiated only by the blood of the offender; and such is their patient inveteracy, that they expect whole months and years the opportunity of revenge. A fine or compensation for murder is familiar to the barbarians of every age; but with the Arabs the kinsmen of the dead are at liberty to accept the atonement, or to exercise with their own hands the law of retaliation. Their refined malice refuses even the head of the murderer, substitutes an innocent for the guilty person, and transfers the penalty to the best and most considerable of the race by whom they have been injured. If he falls by their hands, they are exposed in their turn to the danger of reprisals; the interest and principal of the bloody debt are accumulated; the individuals of either family lead a life of malice and suspicion, and fifty years



ENTRANCE TO PETRA.



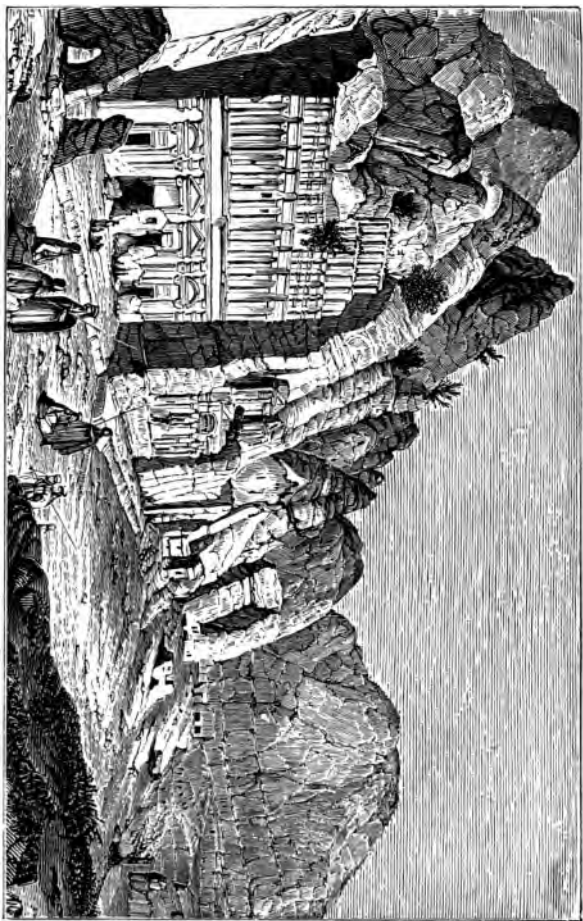
may sometimes elapse before the account of vengeance be finally settled. This sanguinary spirit, ignorant of pity or forgiveness, has been moderated, however, by the maxims of honour, which require in every private encounter some decent equality of age and strength, of numbers and weapons.....

“According to the remark of Pliny, the Arabian tribes are equally addicted to theft and merchandise; the caravans that traverse the desert are ransomed or pillaged; and their neighbours, since the remote times of Job and Sesostris, have been the victims of their rapacious spirit. If a Bedaween discovers from afar a solitary traveller, he rides furiously against him, crying, with a loud voice, ‘Undress thyself; thy aunt (my wife) is without a garment.’ A ready submission entitles him to mercy; resistance will provoke the aggressor, and his own blood must expiate the blood which he presumes to shed in legitimate defence. A single robber, or a few associates, are branded with their genuine name; but the exploits of a numerous band assume the character of lawful and honourable war. The temper of a people thus armed against mankind was doubly inflamed by the domestic license of murder, rapine, and revenge.”*

The name of “Bedaween” or “Bedouins” (from *bedaout*, “man of the desert”) has been applied to the nomades of Arabia, Egypt, and the Northern Sahara. The majority of them are shepherds; a few addict themselves to the much less honourable occupation

* Gibbon, “Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,” v., p. 451.

of plundering trade-caravans; some are shepherds and plunderers by turns. Of the Bedaween generally it may be said that they are "children of the sword." They rejoice in the din of combat and the clash of arms. It is their utmost happiness to mount the war-steed and ride against the foe. The theme of the Arab and his horse, of the strong attachment subsisting between them, of the services which the latter renders to his master, of his courage, swiftness, and fidelity, has been so often and so thoroughly discussed that the reader will forgive us for not enlarging upon it here.



ROCK-CUT TOMBS, PETRA.



CHAPTER VIII.

PETRA, THE NABATHÆAN CAPITAL.

“Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill: though thou shouldst make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the Lord.”—*JER.* xlix. 16.

THE prophecy of Jeremiah has received a terrible fulfilment, and of the splendid Nabathæan capital nothing remains but the tombs and fragments which astonish the traveller through the shadows of the Wâdy Musa.

Imagine a deep cleft cloven through rocks of red sandstone to the depth of one, two, or three hundred feet. This is the Sîk, which, according to the Arab tradition, was made by the rod of Moses when he brought the waters through it into the valley beyond. The cliffs here are almost precipitous, or rather, they would be, did they not, like their brethren throughout this region, overlap, and crumble, and crack, as if they would topple headlong on the daring traveller. The gorge or cleft is about a mile and a half in length, but extremely narrow, and the rocks meet so closely at the top as to give one the idea of an artificial roof.

At its entrance you pass under a fine arch, supposed to be the remains of a former gate to the city. Here the cleft is only twelve feet wide. Thence you proceed along the bed of a torrent, fringed with oleanders, while tamarisk, and wild fig, and ivy droop from the cliff above,—along a road now rough and rugged with stones, but formerly as regularly paved as the Appian Way,—observing a constant succession of tombs, and inscriptions, arches, bridges, niches, and traces of aqueducts.

You continue your journey; and the ravine, and with it the road,—formerly trodden by the rich caravans of India,—winds as if it were the “most flexible of rivers,” instead of being, in truth, a gap through a mountain-wall. Its remarkable sinuosity is owing, perhaps, to the singularly friable character of its cliffs, the same character that has caused the thousand excavations beyond. Hence a beautiful effect is produced, and instead of the monotony of most ravines, you are constantly turning round corners, and catching new lights and new aspects, in which to view the cliffs themselves. They are, for the most part, of a deep red colour, which in the *sunshine* brightens into scarlet. Dean Stanley, however, says that they are, *in fact*, notwithstanding the exaggerated descriptions of earlier travellers, of those darker hues which in the *shadow* amount almost to black.

After a walk of about forty minutes through the phantasmagoric scenes of this wonderfully beautiful



THE KHASNEH, OR TREASURY, PETRA.



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chasm, you see before you "a pale pink front of pillars and sculptured figures" closing the view from top to bottom. Hastening towards it, you find yourself at the end of the defile, and in the presence of an excavated temple, which remains almost entirely perfect between the two flanks of dark rock out of which it is hewn; its admirable preservation, and its light rosy tint being both due to its singular position facing the wall of rock through which the ravine runs, and thus entirely sheltered from the influences of weather.

This is the façade of the principal edifice of Petra, the *Khasneh*, or Treasury.

All authorities agree in affirming that the first view of it is something peculiarly magnificent and impressive: surrounded by the dreary wilderness, it looks like the work of fairy hands: moreover, it is, perhaps, the best preserved monument that antiquity has handed down to us. Dr. Robinson confesses that the first impression overpowered him more than all he had seen in Rome, Thebes, or Athens; that in picturesqueness of situation, fineness and accuracy in the use of the chisel, elegance and harmoniousness in the combination of the parts, the structure is as unique as it is perfect. The beautiful rosy colour of the sandstone when lighted by the rays of the morning sun, and its deep blood-red hues at twilight, vary the effect which it produces. Burckhardt pronounces it to be a work of immense labour, inasmuch as it is not built up with separate blocks of

stone, but, from base to apex, has been excavated out of the solid rock.

Built in the form of a temple façade, and with a façade supported by four columns, the chief apartment in the interior, the *naos*, measures about forty feet in width and twenty-five in height. All the walls are smooth, and bare of ornament, not only in this central chamber, but in the two lateral, and in the *cella*; these, as they are lighted from the front, and have but a single entrance, were probably used as tombs. In the two side rooms which flank the main portal, the same simplicity prevails. The chief entrance passes beneath this portal, which is nobly ornamented on the exterior, by an ascent of five high steps; and on either side of the pillars of the portico the façade is profusely embellished with figures, whose original meaning cannot always be determined.

The four supporting columns of the portico, of which only one is broken, are each three feet in diameter, and thirty-five feet in height. They are surmounted by rich Corinthian capitals. The entire front rises twice as high as the pillars; Burckhardt estimating its elevation at sixty-five feet, Robinson at one hundred, and Laborde at one hundred and twenty. The second story is ornamented with an architrave resting upon pillars, above whose apex the gables approximate; and the whole is crowned with a slender, circular tower, terminating in a cupola and an immense stone urn. All the niches and walls of

the upper portion are filled with representations of female figures, two of which are winged; and the gable end is decorated with Roman eagles more or less defaced. The urn, which occupies the topmost point, has long been the object of the greed of the Bedaween, and the mark of innumerable arrow-shots; for they believe that it is the depository of Pharaoh's treasures. It has not been broken, however, in all their attempts, and the most daring Bedaween would never think of climbing to such a height.

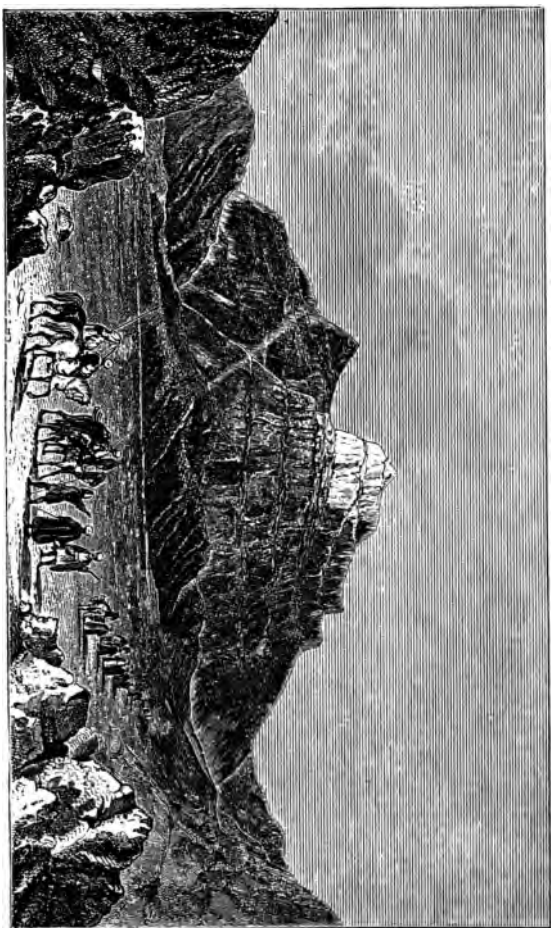
A broad area in front of the Khasneh, one hundred and twenty-five feet wide, and three hundred and eighty-five feet broad, terminates at the south in a steep crag; northward, it opens out into a still broader fissure, which stretches onward for several hundred yards, with tombs on either side. On the left the rock amphitheatre suddenly bursts upon the view, with its tiers of seats and its arena in a perfect state of preservation. From this elevated spot we are able to survey the entire city, with its thousands of tombs. At many points they mount one above another from the base to the very summit of the cliffs; the highest and the smallest looking not unlike the houses of doves and swallows. They are visible everywhere; not only in the cleft where the city proper lies, but in each lateral wády or fissure. The Sík, be it remembered, is but one of many approaches to the Red City, although the largest, the most impressive, and the most richly decorated.

The theatre, excavated in the solid rock, numbers
(615)

thirty-three tiers of benches, each bench capable of accommodating a hundred persons. Thus, there was room for an audience of upwards of three thousand. The structure resembles other works of the same class, except in this particular, that above the uppermost row of seats, and in the cliffs on both sides, there are the same tombs which fill the remainder of the valley. Thus, light and shadow, morning and night, mirth and sorrow, were brought into the closest juxtaposition, as at those classic banquets where the skeleton stared with lack-lustre eyes on the flower-wreathed cups and the merry revellers. The spectator's gaze wandered from the *mimic* scene to the terribly *real* scene beyond; from everything which told of fresh, vigorous, and joyous life, to everything which told of dark and gloomy death. The contrast was startling, or rather, to the Western traveller it is startling; to the inhabitant of Petra, accustomed to live among the sepulchres of his forefathers, it probably conveyed no very powerful impression.

Above the fragments and ruins of the desolate city, and above the colossal walls which shut it in, towers the lofty double peak of Hor, a rugged, solid, barren mass of rock. Burckhardt was anxious to ascend to the summit; but he did not succeed in the attempt, and only gained a level crag or platform from which the so-called "tomb of Aaron" may be seen. Here, in sacrifice to the great High Priest of the Israelites, his Arab companions offered a sheep. They soon retired to the valley below, much to the

MOUNT HOR.





satisfaction of Burckhardt, as he was informed by the Arabs that the tomb contained nothing whatever which would repay him for the toil of a further ascent.

The first Europeans who reached the summit, and visited the so-called "tomb of Aaron," were Bankes, and his companions, Irby and Mangles. They describe the enterprise as very difficult, although in many places the path had been smoothed away, apparently for the accommodation of the numerous pilgrims who formerly ascended it. The time occupied in reaching the top was an hour.

The building consecrated by the name of Aaron differs in nothing from the ordinary sepulchres of the Arab sheikhs and holy men. It is entirely composed of fragments of stone which had been used in an older structure.

The view in all directions from the summit of Mount Hor is very extensive, though few of its conspicuous features are distinguished by name, and the distance is so great that much of it is lost in a shimmering, radiant mist. Enough to say that it includes the mountains which shut in the Dead Sea on the south; that towards the south-east may be seen the Arabian chain; and in the immediate foreground the colossal pile of el-Deir, or the Convent.

Altogether, Petra is not one of the least interesting localities in the Sinaitic Peninsula.



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